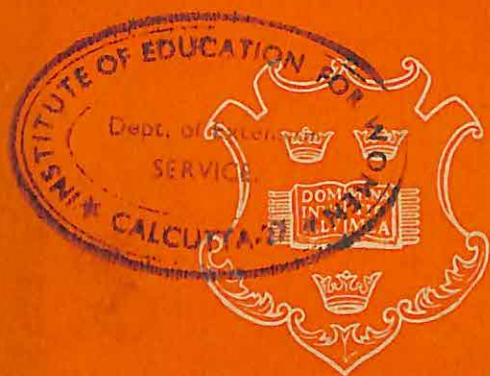


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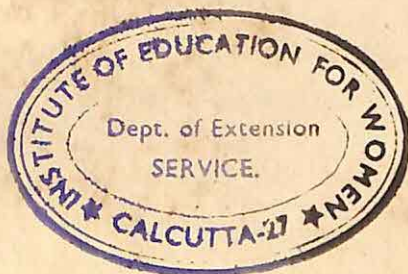
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ON THE AIR



AN ANTHOLOGY
OF THE SPOKEN WORD

CHOSEN BY R. C. GOFFIN





ON THE AIR

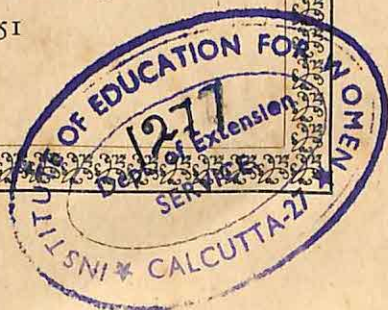


AN ANTHOLOGY
OF THE SPOKEN WORD

CHOSEN BY R. C. GOFFIN

London
Oxford University Press
Geoffrey Cumberlege

1951

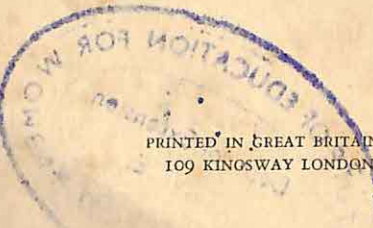


Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C.4

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON

BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS CAPE TOWN IBADAN

Geoffrey Cumberlege, Publisher to the University



PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY HEADLEY BROTHERS LTD
109 KINGSWAY LONDON WC2 AND ASHFORD KENT

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INTRODUCTION



It is usual for students of a foreign language, after becoming proficient, to study some of the books in that language which have become famous. This is an admirable practice, but danger as well as difficulty is apparent in introducing the student too abruptly to the classics of another language.

Some teachers of English abroad, for instance, have held too closely to the older techniques and concerned themselves too much with 'grammar' and 'style' and the requirements of a formal examination paper. Nor has it always been realized that Englishmen to-day do not talk or write letters as do the characters of Jane Austen or Sir Walter Scott or even Anthony Trollope. It is in English as the living language of British and American people that students are chiefly interested.

Fortunately the newspaper and, more recently, the radio, now provide alternatives to classical literature for intermediate studies. In radio broadcasts, particularly, the language remains personal and informal. Yet radio talks are not merely 'colloquial'. Since the speaker is addressing hundreds of thousands of people on some given topic he will consider with some care not only what he is to talk about but how he is to say it.

This book offers a selection of B.B.C. broadcasts on a variety of subjects, as a bridge between the beginner's conversational English and simplified texts and a more mature study of classical literature. Here we have, then, what the student needs at this stage, plain factual prose which conveys a message, unadorned by those fine phrases and rhetorical devices by which so many great writers of the past have achieved distinction.

Yet in this selection of 'talks' the student will find variety in language as well as content, ranging from Peter Fleming's deliberately light-hearted tale (where colloquial phrases like 'an awful mess', 'letting him have a go', and 'getting a kick out of' occur) to Lord Elton's serious discourse.

In every kind of English there are virtues such as lucidity, vividness of description, cogency of argument and phrase, wit, raciness, and force of expression. These will all be found in this book; and such virtues are worthy of study as models of living English, whether written or spoken.

Acknowledgement for permission to reprint these talks (which were printed originally in *The Listener*) is made to the Authors or their representatives.

London, May 1951

R.C.G.

SIR WILLIAM SLIM

What is Courage?

Here the Field-Marshal looks back over his wide experience to give us an anatomy of courage at once simple and inspiring. He shows how courage is of two kinds, moral and physical ; how it is found in peace as well as in war, in women as in men. But while everyone possesses it, more or less, he can, by care, increase his store, or wastefully squander it.



I don't believe there's any man who in his heart of hearts wouldn't rather be called brave than have any other virtue attributed to him. And this elemental, if you like, un-reasoning, male attitude, is a sound one, because courage is not merely a virtue, it's *the* virtue. Without it there are no other virtues. Faith, hope, charity, all the rest don't become virtues until it takes courage to exercise them. Courage isn't only the basis of all virtue; it's its

expression. True, you may be bad and brave, but you can't be good without being brave.

Courage is a mental state—an affair of the spirit—and so it gets its strength from spiritual and intellectual sources. The way in which these spiritual and intellectual elements are blended, I think, produces roughly the two types of courage. The first, an emotional state which urges a man to risk injury or death—physical courage. The second, a more reasoning attitude which enables him coolly to stake career, happiness, his whole future, on his judgement of what he thinks either right or worth while—moral courage.

Now these two types of courage, physical and moral, are very distinct. I have known many men who had marked physical courage but lacked moral courage. Some of them were in high places but they failed to be great in themselves because they lacked it. On the other hand, I've seen men who undoubtedly possessed moral courage very cautious about taking physical risks, but I've never met a man with moral courage who wouldn't, when it was really necessary, face bodily danger. Moral courage is a higher and a rarer virtue than physical courage.

To be really great, a man—or for that matter, a nation—must possess both kinds of courage. In this the Japanese were an interesting study. No other army has ever possessed mass physical courage as the Japanese did. Its whole strength lay in the emotional bravery of the individual soldier. The Japanese generals shared their men's physical bravery to the full, but they lacked, to a man, moral courage. They hadn't the moral courage to admit when their plans had failed and ought to have been

changed, to tell their superiors that their orders couldn't be carried out, and to retreat while there was still time. We played on this weakness and by it the Japanese commanders lost their battles and destroyed their armies.

All men have some degree of physical courage. It's surprising how much. Courage, you know, is like having money in the bank. We start with a certain capital of courage, some large, some small, and we proceed to draw on our balance. But don't forget, courage is an expendable quality. We can use it up. If there are heavy, and what is more serious, if there are continuous calls on our courage, we begin to overdraw. If we go on overdrawing we go bankrupt, we break down.

You can see this overdraft mounting clearly in the men who endure the most prolonged strains in war. The submarine complement, the infantry platoon, the bomber crew. First there comes a growing impatience and irritability; then a hint of recklessness, a sort of 'Oh, to hell with it, chaps, we'll attack' spirit; next, real foolhardiness, what the soldier calls 'asking for it'; and last, sudden changes of mood from false hilarity to black moroseness. If, before that stage is reached, the man's commander has spotted what's happening and pulled him out for a rest, he'll recover. In a few months he'll be back again as brave and as balanced as ever. The capital in his bank of courage will have built up, and he can start spending again.

There are, of course, some people whose capital is so small that it's little worth while employing them, in peace or war, in any job requiring courage—they overdraw too quickly. With us these types are surprisingly

few. Complete cowards are almost non-existent. Another matter for astonishment is the large number of men and women in any group who will behave in an emergency with extreme gallantry. Who they'll be you can't tell until they're tested. I long ago gave up trying to spot potential VCs* by their looks, but, from experience, I should say that those who perform individual acts of the highest physical courage are usually drawn from one of two categories, either those with quick intelligence and vivid imagination, or those without imagination and with minds fixed on the practical business of living. You might almost say, I suppose, those who live on their nerves and those who haven't got any nerves. The one suddenly sees the crisis, his imagination flashes the opportunity and he acts. The other meets the situation without finding it so very unusual and deals with it in a matter-of-fact way.

Long ago, in the First World War, when I was a bit more irresponsible, I served under an officer of vivid imagination. He was always fussing about dangers that usually didn't exist. Once, after a day and half a night of his constant alarms I was so fed up* that I disconnected the telephone in the advanced post I was holding. I wanted some sleep. I didn't get it. Within half an hour his imagination had painted the most frightful pictures of my position overrun by the enemy. He arrived with a reserve company to re-take it. As he was my commanding officer I had some rather difficult explaining to do. I thought he was just windy.* A few days later he won the VC by a superb example of leadership and courage.

Again, in this last war, in Burma, a young Gurkha* won the VC. At a critical moment, when Japanese

medium tanks had broken through our forward positions, he took his Piat—that's an anti-tank grenade discharger—and, leaving cover, moved forward over the open towards the tanks. He was shot in the hand, the shoulder, and again badly in the leg, but he got to within thirty yards of the tanks and he bumped off* two of them. Later, when I saw him in hospital, I asked him why he'd walked forward in the open like that. He replied, 'I'd been trained not to fire the Piat until I was certain of hitting. I knew I could hit at thirty yards, so I went to thirty yards !' He had had only one thought in his head—to get to thirty yards. Quite simple if you aren't bothered by imagination.

Can courage be taught ? I'm sure in one sense physical courage can. What in effect you must do is train the man not to draw too heavily on his stock of courage. Teach him what to expect, not to be frightened by bogeys—by the unknown. If you send an untrained British soldier on patrol in the jungle, every time a branch creaks, every time there's a rustle in the undergrowth, when an animal slinks across the track, when a bush moves in the wind, he'll draw heavily and unnecessarily on his stock of courage, and he'll come back a shaken man with a report of no value. But if you train that man beforehand, let him live in the jungle, teach him its craft, then send him on patrol, he'll come back with his balance of courage unimpaired, and probably a couple of Japanese helmets into the bargain.

To teach moral courage is another matter—and it has to be taught because so few, if any, have it naturally. The young can learn it from their parents, in their homes, from school and university, from religion, from other

early influences. But to inculcate it in a grown-up who lacks it, requires not so much teaching as some striking emotional experience, something that suddenly bursts on him, something in the nature of a vision. That happens rarely, and that's why you'll find that most men with moral courage learnt it by precept and example in their youth.

Now, I suppose, because I am a soldier, I've talked most of courage in men at war, but the fighting man is the last to claim a monopoly in courage. Many a soldier in the last war steeled himself in battle with the thought of what his civilian fellow-countrymen and women were enduring and how they were enduring it. As a matter of fact, whether women are braver than men I don't know, but I've always found them, when really tested, at least equally brave.

In the retreat from Burma in 1942 I was deeply proud of the troops who staggered into India, exhausted, ragged, reduced to a remnant, but carrying their weapons and ready to turn again and face the enemy. Yet the outstanding impression of courage I carried away from that rather desperate campaign was from the Indian women refugees. Day after day, mile after mile, they plodded on, through dust or mud, babies in their arms, children clinging to their skirts, harried by ruthless enemies, strafed* from the air, shelterless, caught between the lines in every battle, yet patient, uncomplaining, devoted, thinking only of their families, and so very brave.

Now, without talking any nonsense about Master Races,* as the Japanese and Germans did, it is a fact that races do vary in courage. Some are braver than others,

and you jolly soon* find out which they are when you fight them. At a guess I should say it depends mostly on where they've lived for the past five or six hundred years. If it's been in a land where it didn't take much effort to get enough food, clothing, and shelter for an easy life, they won't be conspicuously brave. If they've lived where life is so hard that it's a terrible struggle against nature to keep any standard of living at all, then they'll be brave in a few things—dangers to which they're inured—but not at all brave in others. It's the lands where nature is neither too easy nor too cruel, where a man must work hard to live but where his efforts and his enterprise can bring him great rewards, those are the lands that breed courage and where it becomes a natural tradition. And don't run away with the idea that this limits courage to northern Europe and North America. Believe me—and I've fought both with and against them—some of the bravest races in the world aren't white at all.

And while nations vary in the amount of their courage, they vary, too, in its type. We, the British, have our own special kind of courage—the courage that goes on. And endurance is the very essence of courage. Courage is a long-term virtue. Anyone can be brave for a little while. The British are no braver than the Germans, the French, the Italians, or anybody else. But they are brave for a bit longer. This going on being brave when most others would have given up has been the racial characteristic of our courage.

It's interesting to speculate how we've developed this particularly practical and effective kind of courage. I'm inclined to think that, like so much else in the world, it's

been a matter of geography and history. We draw our racial stock almost wholly from northern Europe, one of the good areas for natural courage, and our intellectual and cultural heritage almost entirely from the Mediterranean, the great source of enlightened thought. At any rate, in all the great moments of our history, we have based our natural courage on a faith, the belief that we worked or fought for the things that mattered, for a decent life, for the freedom of the spirit. That's been our strength.

And it remains our strength, for the same courage which has seen us through the crisis of war is needed now to see us through the hardly less formidable difficulties of peace. How fortunate are we, then, that we come of a race that, whatever its faults, has never failed for want of courage.

NOTES

Sir William Slim, b. 1891. Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in Burma during the Second World War. In 1948 he was appointed Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the highest post in the British Army.

V C, (Winner of) the Victoria Cross, a decoration given for conspicuous acts of personal bravery in actual fighting. It was founded by Queen Victoria in 1856.

fed up, annoyed, irritated.

windy, frightened.

Gurkha, Nepalese (soldier).

bump off, dispose of, get rid of.

strafe (German), punish, (here) bombard.

Master Race, race which claims to be better than all others.

jolly soon, very soon.

LUCILLE IREMONGER

Seven Months in an Open Canoe

Sir William Slim has just told us that 'endurance is the very essence of courage', and this 'escape story' is one of endurance that survived the cruellest series of misfortunes. Nabetari and his friends laid their plans carefully enough, but these were all frustrated in the actual escape. Neither the loss of two of the three canoes, nor that of the sails, nor even the capsizing of his own craft and the drowning of his one remaining comrade, could deter Nabetari from his purpose.



This is the story of a young man called Nabetari who lives in a remote village in one of the scattered coral islets which make up the Gilbert group. It was from those islands that Robert Louis Stevenson* wrote many of his famous essays from the South Seas. Nabetari is only twenty-eight years old even now,* a burly young fellow, with the straight black hair, dark skin, and the broad, ingenuous

smile of the typical Gilbertese. It would be impossible to pick him out from his companions as someone to whom anything extraordinary had ever happened. Yet Nabetari has lived through the most terrible ordeal of its kind any human being has surely ever been called on to endure. Let me tell his story.

Perhaps it begins on the day Nabetari left home, his home island of Nikunau, the day the phosphate steamer came to collect labour recruits. For Nabetari was going to Ocean Island to work in the phosphate diggings there, to gaze at his first house and his first motor car, to sit stupefied at his first cinema show, and to earn a few pounds. When his term in the phosphate diggings was over he would go home in the same steamer, set up for life* almost by his earnings, and rich in experience of the great world as represented by Ocean Island—that bare, drought-stricken, miserable outpost, which was the nearest he would ever get to what we call civilization. Perhaps, though, the story really begins 1,500 years ago. Perhaps it began with his ancestors who came to Nikunau in one of the great waves of migration, when the Pacific was first populated. They were a black, wiry people, resolute, courageous, resourceful.

In 1942, then, the twenty-two-year-old Nabetari was on Ocean Island working in the phosphate diggings. And then the Japanese came. Japan had had her eye* on 'Ocean' for a long time. The Europeans there had been evacuated, all but six men who volunteered to remain at their posts. Besides them, there were on this little island—an oyster-shaped little island only seven miles in circumference—about 2,500 souls, counting men, women

and children, foreign labourers and the original inhabitants—and Nabetari. That was a large number of mouths to feed on any small island, however fertile. And, ironically enough, this little island, which was the source of the highest-grade fertilizer in the world, was itself little more than coral rock covered with a few feet of seabirds' droppings. The Japanese hurriedly shipped the majority of the people to other Pacific islands, and left only enough men and girls to attend to their wants—the men principally chosen for their skill as fishermen.

In time the tide of war turned. Allied bombers made the approach of supply ships to the island more and more dangerous, and soon the Japanese conquerors realized that they were cut off, and that they must try to live off the land.* Little besides coconut trees grew there, and soon they were facing starvation. At this time Nabetari and his friends noticed a most sinister development. The Japanese were starting to take fishing lessons. They were apt pupils, too. And you do have to know how to fish in those waters. Soon it seemed that they would be able to fend for themselves. Nabetari grew more and more uneasy, an uneasiness that increased to alarm when one of 'Ocean's' celebrated droughts hit the island, and dragged on month after month, from one year into the next. Then something happened which showed Nabetari it was time to act. One day the fishermen were ordered to dig a number of holes in the ground. The holes were to measure about six feet long, about six feet deep, and about two feet wide. And the number of the holes was exactly the same as the number of men left on the island.

Nabetari and six friends made a plan. Between them

they had three little outrigger* sailing canoes which they used for fishing, very different craft from the mighty vessels of their ancestors, but still, canoes, and with sails. That day they stole a few coconuts—a crime punishable by death by beheading under the Japs—and some Japanese army water-bottles full of water—an even worse crime in an island where water was always scarce. That night the little flotilla of three with their butterfly-wing sails did not return as usual with their catch. Instead they stood out from the land, and set a course for the Gilbert Islands 240 miles to the eastward and against the prevailing wind and current.

On the very first night a catastrophe befell the seven men on the ocean. One of the canoes—the one with three men in it—failed to keep touch with the other two. By morning it was out of sight, never to be heard of again. After that the two remaining canoes tried to keep together by a rope passed between them every night. The four men who were left managed to keep alive by fishing. At times they even caught enough to put some by, and sun-dried it for future use. Mostly they fished for bonito,* using a red feather lure which they flicked over the surface of the water. At other times they fished for sharks. The Gilbertese can never understand the sufferings of castaway white men adrift in open boats on the ocean. 'But they had only got to catch sharks!' they will exclaim. 'There are always plenty of sharks!' Nabetari and his mates were able to catch sharks, not for the sake of their flesh, but to drink their blood.

Then came the second catastrophe. The two canoes lost their sails in a sudden squall. The crews were now

without their main motive power, and they found themselves too weak to paddle their unmanageable craft for hundreds of miles against wind and current. The outrigger canoe is supreme as a sailer. Indeed, the sailing canoes the Gilbertese make are the fastest in the world. The outrigger lifts out of the water, as the canoe heels over under the wind, and leaves just the slender hull to be driven through the sea. But in light winds, or without any sail on, then the outrigger comes well down into the water, and forms a severe handicap. In rough weather it is such an encumbrance that the vessel can hardly be forced through the water at all. So Nabetari and his three friends had to give up all hope of going on eastward to the Gilberts. They could do nothing but drift slowly back to the westward once more—heartbreaking to go back on their tracks, with the fear of bringing up on ‘Ocean’ once again always at the back of their minds. Day after day they drifted on, sighting no land. They sailed right past Ocean Island.

Then the third blow fell. The two canoes became separated. It only needed one of a thousand mischances to bring about this third stroke of ill fortune, and it did not fail to turn up. And nothing more has ever been heard of that canoe and the men in her, either. And now only Nabetari and one companion, Reuera, were left. Then, one night, some time later, the last canoe capsized. The men in her were asleep. Reuera sank at once beneath the waves, and did not come up again. Nabetari was alone in the middle of the Pacific with an overturned canoe, and no fellow creature within hundreds of miles. He was weak, but he succeeded in righting the canoe

single-handed, climbing aboard her once more and emptying her of water. After this he drifted on alone, fishing when he could, but growing weaker and weaker. Twice he saw aeroplanes overhead, and waved a cloth at them—in vain. Twice ships passed by—one of them so close that he recognized her crew—as Japanese.

One day an Australian doctor at the base hospital at Manus, the largest of the Admiralty Islands off the coast of New Guinea, was summoned to a neighbouring island to treat a castaway found on the shore. When his canoe had driven ashore at last Nabetari had lain on the beach unable to move. Then, strangely, he had returned to his old element, the sea. He had to drag himself back to the water, and then he painfully propelled himself along the shore by feeble movements of his hands and arms. For a whole morning and afternoon he struggled on like that, and then a party of men on the shore sighted him. That was in the month of November on Ninigo Island, in the Admiralty Group, 1,500 miles west of Ocean Island. The date on which Nabetari had left Ocean Island was April 4th. He had been on the sea for seven months.

Is it possible that anyone else has ever survived such a voyage since the world began? Surely not! And yet—Nabetari's ancestors had been sailing about the Pacific for thousands of years. Was such an experience so uncommon in the old days? At any rate, we are allowed a glimpse now of what manner of men these were—and it is a glimpse which makes possible the seeming impossibilities which have always puzzled those who have tried to follow the movements of primitive people in the

Pacific. Either this was a race of heroes—or the Pacific was never populated at all. The Pacific was populated, we know that, and we have had to surmise without other evidence that this was a race of heroes. And here is the evidence.

As soon as he was fit to travel after three months in hospital, Nabetari was flown back to the Gilberts, now once again in British hands. There an intelligence officer taught him map reading—with wonderful results. His observation was so acute, and his memory was so accurate, even after his ordeal, that he was able to give minute descriptions of the Japanese fortifications on Ocean Island, their numbers and dispositions, and the damage the enemy had done to the phosphate workings and machinery; and every detail was found to be correct when Ocean Island was retaken. Nabetari's evidence concerning the fate of the six gallant Europeans left behind on the island was of the greatest importance, too. The Japanese themselves confessed that after his escape they had murdered the islanders left behind—so Nabetari was the sole survivor to tell of the true fate of the white men. The tale he had to tell followed a course of brutality, torture and finally murder.

As was fitting, Nabetari was present on Ocean Island when the Union Jack was hoisted once more. A member of the British occupation forces there put to him a question present in everybody's mind—hadn't he been afraid when he had been alone on the sea in that tiny canoe during all those weary months? 'Yes,' Nabetari replied simply, with a beaming smile, 'Yes, *many* times.'

NOTES

Lucille Iremonger, author and broadcaster. She first visited the Pacific Islands as wife of a member of the Colonial Service. Her book, *It's a Bigger Life*, on her travels there was recently awarded the Lady Brittain trophy.

Robert Louis Stevenson, 1850-94. Essayist, novelist, poet, and traveller. He spent the last years of his life in the South Pacific.

twenty-eight years old even now. This talk was given in 1948.

set up for life, i.e. having earned enough to live on for the rest of his life.

had her eye on, i.e. had waited her opportunity to seize.

live off the land, i.e. get their food from the trees, bushes, etc., which grew on the island.

outrigger, for preventing the canoe from turning over in a rough sea.

bonito, a large fish like a mackerel, a striped tunny.

H. W. TILMAN

The Abominable Snowman

Here is a mystery story where the solution is not provided. Certain extraordinary footprints are discovered (and photographed) high up among the snows of the Himalayas. Can they possibly be, as they appear to be, human? The story of their discovery is told lightheartedly and with ironic humour, but it sets a problem as yet unsolved by science.



In 1921 Colonel Howard Bury, leader of the first Mount Everest party,* came upon footprints closely resembling those of a human being on the Lakhpa La, a 22,000-foot pass north-east of the mountain. In a dispatch telegraphed home he mentioned this and also the belief of his porters that the tracks were made by the Wild Men of the Snows. In order to show his opinion of such a laughable idea, he put no fewer than three exclamation marks after the statement, but in spite of this the news was accorded its

full value, and Colonel Howard Bury learnt, no doubt, how hard it is to be funny by telegraph.

Science, like the bookies,* welcomes all speculation. We must all, if we can, add our mite to the sum of knowledge. Sherlock Holmes* wrote a monograph on the trivial subject of tobacco ash; Darwin's* treatise on earthworms is well known; and now, in a humbler way, I attempt to throw some light on the Abominable Snowman. Nearly all the evidence I have collected on behalf of his existence consists of footprints, but if fingerprints can hang a man I see no reason why footprints should not establish the existence of one. Recently, however, I came upon some more substantial evidence which I shall deal with last. It is fitting that the starting-point of our inquiry should be Mount Everest—a mountain whose summit is still untrodden, which was for long itself mysterious, and upon which strange things have happened. Let us go back then to Colonel Bury's discovery in 1921, when the prodigy was born. A godfather was at hand in Darjeeling for the christening.

A Mr Henry Newman interviewed the porters and got a full description of the Wild Men—how their feet were turned backwards to enable them to climb easily and how their hair was so long that in going downhill it fell over their eyes. *Metch-kangmi*, they were called—'kangmi' meaning snowmen, and 'metch' Mr Newman happily translated as 'abominable', the Tibetan word meaning someone who is emphatically dirty. Mr Newman's own theory was that the tracks were made by men who were either outlaws or, in his own words, 'ascetics striving to obtain magical powers by cutting themselves off

from mankind and refusing to wash'. We mountaineers may be wrong in thinking we have a monopoly of the high snows, but I should be astonished to find a native of the Himalayas, however guilty, ascetic, or careless about washing, living at 21,000 feet.

Before 1921 and no doubt after, the Abominable Snowman pursued his unobtrusive way of life, but it is not until 1936 that we hear of him again. Mr Ronald Kaulback, travelling in the Upper Salween, reported having seen at 16,000 feet five sets of tracks which, in his words, 'looked exactly as though made by a bare-footed man'. He added, and this is important, that in those parts there were no bears. More evidence was tendered by Wing-Commander Beauman, who reported similar tracks from the Central Himalayas.

Anyone with a scientific mind is outraged by the notion of something beyond his knowledge, something which does not square with* what he already knows, so naturally a lot of people wrote to *The Times* about these tracks, particularly experts from the Natural History Museum. Large langur monkeys were suggested, to which Mr Kaulback replied that he had neither seen nor heard of any monkeys there and that the tracks were 3,000 feet above the tree line. The experts withdrew their monkey, the shoe not fitting, and produced their Cinderella.* 'We are told there are no bears', they countered, 'but what about the Giant Panda or Snow Bear?' The suggestion was considered a shrewd one and Mr Kaulback wrote to say he was ashamed he had not thought of it himself. But maybe there was a hint of sarcasm, for he added that he had never heard of pandas in those parts nor were there

any bamboo shoots—a *sine qua non** for pandas, without which they languish and die.

So far then we have as candidates for the makers of queer tracks noted by three independent observers, outlaws, ascetics, bears, monkeys, pandas, or X, the unknown quantity. Such was the state of the poll* in 1936, but in the autumn of 1937 a new witness appeared who in one stroke settled, or was thought to have settled, the matter. The bear was the winner, and our abominable friend was declared to be not only at the bottom of the poll but something less than a man of straw* who never should have stood at all.

In an article in *The Times*, Mr Smythe described how in Garhwal in the Central Himalayas at 16,500 feet he and his Sherpa porters found the 'imprints of a huge foot, apparently of a biped'. Photographs and measurements were taken and to clinch the thing the Sherpas were induced to sign a statement to the effect that the tracks were those of a *metch-kangmi*. They added that although they had never seen one, because anyone who does dies or is killed, they had seen pictures of his tracks in Tibetan monasteries.

How to identify the footprint of a thing one has never seen by a picture of what a Tibetan lama imagines it to be is a fairly bold proceeding. Tibetan art is decidedly post-impressionist* and one would as soon expect to find in a monastery a scale drawing of a battleship as a working likeness of a *metch-kangmi*'s foot. No, these Sherpas were frightened men. Fear sometimes makes men bold, and they put their thumb-marks to this bold statement in order to justify their fear. Mr Smythe's prints were submitted

to the zoological pundits and were pronounced by them (not without some scientific snarling over species) to be those of a bear. Whereupon Mr Smythe, waving his Sherpas' affidavit, concluded that the tracks described in recent letters were made by this bear and that a superstition of the Himalayas was now laid to rest. In short, any tracks seen in the high snows then or thereafter might safely be ascribed to bears and nothing else, which of course is nonsense.

Stunned by the combined authority of *The Times* and Mr Smythe, few people paused to reflect that this brutal and apparently final extinction of a species new to science was merely a matter of three frightened Sherpas mistaking the identity of some bear tracks. Tracks in soft snow are always difficult to diagnose. However, facts are stubborn things, and luckily the season of 1937 was an active one in the Himalayas. Two correspondents of more robust mind, refusing to be cowed by this fatal edict, published convincing evidence of having seen large circular tracks totally unlike bear tracks, one on the upper Biafo glacier at 19,000 feet, and one on the Birch Ganga glacier in Garhwal.

At that time I had an open mind on the subject, though I should have had no difficulty in concealing my chagrin had the scientific sceptics been confounded; but in 1938 I too saw tracks which could not be explained away by shouting 'Bear' any more than could those seen by Kaulback, Beauman, Bhalu, and others. It was in Sikkim this time, when two Sherpas and I were crossing the Zemu Gap, a 19,000-foot pass between Kangchenjunga and Simvu. The weather was thick, the snow soft, and as

we plodded up a long easy snow slope we saw by our side a single line of footsteps which in view of the prevailing weather could not be many days old. Both the Sherpas and I thought we had been forestalled in the crossing of the Gap, and when we gained the col* we craned our necks over the other side, which is extremely steep, to see which line this solitary climber had taken. But the tracks, having reached the col, disappeared on some rocks on the Simvu side.

Lunatics are not as common as we think, and only a lunatic would go swanning* about alone on the Zemu glacier. On reaching Darjeeling I made inquiries. No party had been out recently, and to grasp the significance of that it must be understood that it is almost inconceivable that the presence or movements of a climbing party in Sikkim should remain unknown. Porters will talk, and the numerous books and journals devoted to mountaineering show that mountaineers, though they may be strong, are not often silent.* I was told that the last visit to those parts had been made by Brigadier John Hunt, to whom I wrote and from whom I had a remarkable reply. He himself had been to the Gap in November the previous year and had seen there a double line of tracks. He assumed they were those of a German party who had been on the Zemu glacier six weeks before. 'But', he wrote me, 'I have just received their book from which it is clear that they never went to the Gap at all. What on earth is the explanation?' To my mind the answer is pretty obvious.

There is a discrepancy between the tracks seen by Hunt and myself and those seen by two previous witnesses.

Theirs were circular while ours resembled those made by large boots. Bearing in mind that the thing we are looking for is not necessarily a brute beast, not quite so dumb as we imagine, but an erect being who may have come down from his tree* even earlier than we did, I have a theory to fit both these tracks. Even beavers, bees, ants, birds, are not without constructive ability, so why should we not credit the Snowman with a glimmering of sense? Why should he not have adopted a primitive form of snow-shoe?—an obvious and simple device which must have been thought of even before the notion of using tree trunks as rollers. To the objection that snow-shoes are unknown to natives of the Himalayas, my answer is that they never or seldom travel above the snow line, while the Snowman never travels below it.

Finally I come to my last and more substantial evidence, more tangible and less open to conjecture than tracks about which not only scientists but Winnie-the-Pooh* had doubts. 'Tracks!' said Piglet, 'Paw-marks! Oh, Pooh. Do you think it's a Woozle?' 'It may be,' said Pooh. 'You never can tell with paw-marks.' In a recent book I rashly asserted that no European had ever seen an Abominable Snowman. I was wrong. It was Dr Odell who at once showed me a book printed for private circulation by A. N. Tombazi describing a tour made in Sikkim in 1925. The encounter occurred, significantly enough, some ten miles from the Zemu Gap and to do Mr Tombazi's evidence full justice I quote verbatim. Having been called from his tent by his porters, he says:

'Intense glare prevented my seeing anything for the first few seconds, but I soon spotted the object

referred to, two or three hundred yards away down the valley. Unquestionably the figure in outline was exactly like a human being, walking upright and stooping occasionally to uproot some dwarf rhododendron. It showed dark against the snow and wore no clothing. Within the next minute or so it had moved into some thick scrub and disappeared. I examined the footprints which were similar in shape to those of a man but only 6 or 7 inches long. Marks of five toes and instep were clear but trace of heel indistinct. The prints were undoubtedly those of a biped. From inquiries I gathered that no man had gone in this direction since the beginning of the year. The coolies naturally trotted out fantastic legends of Demons, Snowmen. Without in the least believing these delicious fairy-tales, notwithstanding the plausible yarns told by natives, I am at a loss to express any definite opinion on the subject. I can only reiterate with a sufficient degree of certainty that the silhouette of the mysterious being was identical with the outline of a human figure.

Mr Tombazi with his 'fantastic legends' and 'delicious fairy-tales' is evidently an unwilling witness and all the more valuable on that account. He is like the old lady at the Zoo who when confronted with the giraffe could only say she didn't believe it. I cannot produce for you a scale drawing of a Snowman or even number his hairs on the strength of a footprint, though the professors in their search for the missing link are less modest. Chesterton* has remarked on the loving care and skill bestowed by them on building up *Pithecanthropus**—a bit of skull

here, a few teeth there, and a thigh bone from somewhere else—until at last they produce a detailed drawing carefully shaded to show that the very hairs of his head were numbered. I am at a loss to express a definite opinion. I merely affirm that tracks for which no adequate explanation is forthcoming have been seen and will, no doubt, continue to be seen in the Himalayas, and until a better claimant is found we may as well attribute them to their rightful owner, the Abominable Snowman.

NOTES

H. W. Tilman, b. 1898. He has led many mountaineering expeditions, both in the Himalayas and in Africa.

Mount Everest party. From time to time a party of explorers is organized to try to climb Mount Everest, the highest mountain in the world.

bookies, bookmakers, men who accept bets on the results of horse races.

Sherlock Holmes, the most famous of all fictional detectives. He is often spoken of as if he really lived.

Charles Darwin, 1809-82, author of *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* in which he expounded his widely accepted theory of Evolution.

square with, agree with.

the shoe not fitting . . . Cinderella, i.e. that theory being clearly unsuitable; they produced another which they thought would fit the facts. The reference is to the fairy tale of Cinderella, who was traced by her lover by means of her tiny slipper.

sine qua non (Latin), an essential.

poll, the idea in the speaker's mind is that of a political election, with candidates, one of whom 'wins', or 'heads the poll'.

man of straw, imaginary opponent, who, in argument, is set up just to be knocked down.

post-impressionist, giving the artist's own feelings about something rather than showing what most men see, and therefore very unlike a photograph.

col, top of the pass.

swanning, wandering aimlessly.

strong . . . silent, in many Victorian and other novels men of action are supposed to be unable to express themselves.

come down from his tree, i.e. be descended from apes according to Darwin's theory of Evolution.

Winnie-the-Pooh, a small bear which is one of the chief characters in some well-known children's books by A. A. Milne.

G. K. Chesterton, 1874-1936. Essayist and novelist.

Pithecanthropus, from two Greek words, meaning 'ape-man', a link, in the theory of Evolution, between apes and men.

ANTHONY ASHTON

The Technique of Committees

This is a picture of the important part played by the 'committee' in regulating modern affairs, and contains some advice on how the best use of this instrument of democracy can be achieved. As will be seen it is essentially a practical instrument which tends towards compromise rather than ideal solutions. Many minds, however, working sympathetically together as a team can sometimes arrive at valuable and even constructive findings.



Imagine a large room, with tables set round in a hollow square. Round the outside of the square sit about thirty men of many different nationalities. They have met together to share out a scarce raw material among the nations which want it. This is the new diplomacy. Not very many years ago it would all have been decided behind closed doors by a few discreet officials of the

diplomatic service, or by rival business men sending cables or talking over the long-distance telephone. Now, it is decided by these thirty men, who form an international committee.

In the middle of one side of the square sits the chairman. He is the most important person in the room. On him rests much of the responsibility for the success or failure of the committee. As the meeting opens, he runs briskly through a number of formalities. While this is happening we have an opportunity to get the 'feel' of this particular committee. For a committee is not just a mere collection of individuals. From the moment its members meet, it begins to have a sort of nebulous life of its own. No two committees are alike. Some are sluggish, some are brisk. Some are bold, more are cautious. Some are formal and grave, others free and easy, and even hilarious. This committee, one feels, is business-like and rather proud of itself, even perhaps a little smug.

As soon as the formalities are over, the chairman turns to the first item on the agenda, and asks the French delegate to speak. The Frenchman begins by saying that he has for some time been deeply concerned at the way in which the committee has been sharing out the raw material by means of a sort of haphazard bartering between the delegates. There ought to be clear principles, strict rules of procedure, a formula. All this, of course, is very French. The British delegate is obviously deeply pained by this proposal. He deplores any attempt to restrict the committee by anything as definite as rules. Everything should be left to ordinary commonsense, the give and take* of men of good will sitting round a table

to solve a problem in their common interest. They should deal with things as they arise. They should not commit themselves beforehand to things they cannot foresee. All this, of course, is very British. For a time the matter is argued. Other delegates speak. The discussion gets complicated, and the chairman stops it by suggesting that it should be discussed further at the next meeting. He does this because he knows that a committee as such—however clever and acute its members are individually—is quite incapable of logical and sustained thought. A committee can only deal with complicated matters by getting individuals to do the thinking for it, and present it with a few simple and clearly defined issues to decide on. In this case the chairman has a shrewd idea that a few minutes' conversation between the British and French delegates after the meeting might settle the matter.

The chairman now passes to the main business of the day—the sharing-out of, say, some 5,000,000 tons of material between a score or so of countries which among them say they need about 8,000,000 tons. Each delegate has before him a table of figures showing how the secretary and his staff of officials think the material might be shared out. First of all each delegate in turn makes a formal speech emphasizing his country's need. Most of their speeches are short. One of the delegates, however, goes on and on and on, and becomes frankly boring. The chairman's face is a study in patience. One of the delegates makes a sarcastic remark to his neighbour which can clearly be heard by everyone. Quick as a shot the chairman rounds on him with a rebuke, for he is determined that anyone may be as boring as he likes, but no

one may be nasty. This is important, for men and women tend to be much more emotional in their reactions when they are members of a committee than when they are faced with the same problems as separate individuals. In committee they become touchy, quick to take affront if they imagine they are being slighted, gratified if they are praised, noble and idealistic if their better feelings are appealed to, and harsh and unforgiving when they are angry. A committee is highly suggestible,* and the atmosphere can change very quickly: a few hasty words, and a genial conference may turn suddenly into a violent battle. It is for this reason that experienced chairmen always try to give their committees a permanent bias towards geniality, with exaggerated forms of courtesy, and a lot of praise and thanks, even when they are undeserved. In a successful committee you never hear anyone say, 'Shut up, and don't talk nonsense,' but rather, 'I think Mr So-and-so has made a particularly valuable contribution to the discussion, but with respect I wonder whether at this stage it would not be more appropriate . . .' and so on.

The important part played by emotion in the life of a committee is also well brought out by what happens next. When the opening speeches are over, the real bargaining begins. One delegate—let us call him the Greek delegate—thinks that his country should have a bigger allocation. The chairman asks whether any other country will give up some of its suggested share in favour of Greece. No country will. The matter is debated backwards and forwards. It begins to look like a deadlock. Then another—suppose we call him the Norwegian

delegate—creates a diversion. He speaks warmly. He says he remembers the days of the war when the Greeks—ill-equipped and out-numbered—fought the Germans gallantly. In memory of that fight by Greece, he offers one shipload of Norway's allocation. The offer and the speech clearly affect the meeting. Two other countries give up some small quantities, and Greece is satisfied.

During this discussion another delegate has been ominously silent. He now gives many good reasons why his country should have more. The chairman repeats his previous procedure. Will anyone give up a few shiploads? No one will. Various suggestions are made. It passes dinner-time. It begins to look as though the proceedings will break down. The delegate won't budge an inch. Neither will anyone else; the matter is urgent and must be settled that day somehow or other; but no one is prepared to let this feeling of urgency overrule his determination to do his best for his own country. Just when everyone is feeling utterly weary and exasperated, the chairman makes a suggestion. He has had it in mind for some time, but feared that if he had made it earlier the meeting would not have accepted it. Now that they are all so tired he thinks they will jump at it. He gives reasons why there might conceivably be a bit more than 5,000,000 tons to share out. He proposes that, if there is, the delegate's country should have a first charge.* Everyone knows that in fact there is likely to be less than 5,000,000 tons rather than more. The delegate knows this as well as the others, but he sees he is not getting anywhere, and the suggestion enables him to give way without seeming to do so. He agrees, and the chairman hurriedly closes the meeting.

In describing this imaginary meeting I have tried to illustrate some of the main characteristics of committees, and in particular to show how committees differ from individuals. It is becoming increasingly important to us to know how committees work, for they are being more and more widely used and, whether we like it or not, are profoundly affecting our way of life. During the last hundred years or so in most countries there has been a change from government by individuals to government by committees—that is, parliaments. In Britain to-day, too, civil servants work increasingly through inter-departmental committees. In industry the joint-stock company has transferred the direction of most big firms from individuals to committees of directors. Trade unions are nothing more nor less than complicated hierarchies of committees. In recent years, the workers have demanded an increasing share in management, and many joint consultative committees have been formed. Nationalization means a big extension of committee work, putting whole industries under the control of public boards. Other industries have tended to organize themselves more and more closely under trade associations. In the last few years the committee has also invaded the international field. There are now international committees to regulate nearly every human activity.

All this is a logical development of the growth of democracy—of the feeling that the wishes and opinions of a mass of people are more important than those of a few individuals. Co-operation is the idea, and the committee is its instrument. It has been said that conflict may be resolved either by the domination of one of the parties to

the disagreement or by a compromise between them, or yet again by an integration of the several points of view. It is this integration which the committee technique attempts to achieve. But it cannot do the impossible: it cannot resolve a really fundamental cleavage. The committee I have described succeeded because, though its members wrangled and haggled, they were all agreed, to start with, that the raw material must be shared out fairly, and that at all costs they must avoid a purely competitive scramble for it, with the weakest going without. A committee whose members have completely opposed conceptions of life is unlikely to produce more than vituperation. Committee members must, broadly speaking, agree in their general aim. And the simpler and more practical the aim, the more likely is the committee to succeed. Committees set up, for example, to do such vague things as to formulate human rights or to discover the causes of war are not likely to produce anything very useful—even if they can agree. But committees to share out coal or wheat, for example, seem to do very well.

One very important result of the growth of committees has been the rise to power of the committee-man. What makes a good committee-man? To begin with, he must be able to get on well with other people. He should be evidently trustworthy, have an easy manner, and be able to talk persuasively. He should be alert, with a quick brain, able to see several sides of a question dispassionately. He should be patient, and willing to compromise when necessary. These would all be virtues in any man, but notice that they are not the same virtues as those that make a man of action or a creative artist. They are

qualities found particularly among professional men and particularly too among the British.

Just as the demand for committee-men is creating a new profession it is also creating a new technique. Being a good committee-man is like other arts—to some extent it can be learned. The aspirant begins by acting as a secretary to a committee, or serving for a time on an unimportant sub-committee. He learns to address the chair,* speak persuasively, and keep to the subject. He watches the ebb and flow of opinion in the committee, and sees how the chairman controls it. He discovers the value of lobbying* and learns when to give in gracefully, and when to hold out obstinately. He learns the importance of good timing—that you can get away with something in the late afternoon that you would not even dream of trying on in the morning. He also learns that the issues must be kept simple, and the atmosphere pleasant; that it is better to have informal minutes and to hold meetings in private—so that members will not fear public opinion (or seek its favour). He finds that it is better to avoid formal voting, for this lessens the individual member's sense of responsibility—which already in any committee is weak enough as it is. He learns how to deal with different situations—stalemate, lethargy, confusion, and irritation. In time he will emerge as a fully trained and practised committee-man.

I began by describing the proceedings of a highly successful committee. Not all committees work as well as this. Some work very badly indeed. In fact, the committee technique often gets a bad name because too much is expected of it. A committee's main function is to resolve

conflict—to produce a solution on which several parties can agree. But when all is said, this will only be one possible solution—it will not necessarily be the right one. And a committee cannot think deeply or create anything: no committee ever painted a picture, designed a machine, or even cooked a good meal. This means in practice that wherever there are committees, there must also be intelligent and forceful individuals to feed them, guide them, and to provoke them, and then to translate their decisions into quick and resolute action. Sometimes the individuals may be members of the committee—in the committee I described to begin with, you will remember that it was the secretary who suggested in the first place how the raw material should be shared out. But often this works badly because the qualities required are different; the individual may upset the committee, and at the same time feel frustrated and exasperated by the committee procedure. Often it is better to keep the two functions separate. But that there are two functions I think there can be no doubt. Individuals working without committees often become unbalanced and intolerant, create friction, and carry measures to dangerous extremes. Committees without strong individuals behind them produce muddled thinking, shirk issues, invariably bow to public opinion, and exalt the commonplace.

The committee is one of man's important social discoveries—like the use of money, the rule of law and the specialization of labour—but it is not a panacea. To solve problems it is not enough merely to set up committees. They can moderate and guide the creative energy of individual men, but they can never be a substitute for it.

However we twist and turn, we cannot escape from the burden laid upon us—that always some individual man must think hard, laboriously accumulate knowledge, and have the inspiration from which alone the solutions to our problems can come.

NOTES

Anthony Ashton, b. 1916. Has been civil servant, soldier, journalist, and coal administrator. Now works for an international oil company in London.

give and take, willingness to compromise.

suggestible, sensitive to suggestion.

have a first charge, i.e. get his extra share first.

address the chair, i.e. the person who occupies it.

The phrase emphasizes the importance of the office of chairman.

lobbying (of people who have a special interest in the committee's decisions), arguing outside the committee room to persuade committee members.

LORD ELTON

On Worrying

Lord Elton speaks first of the anxieties of childhood which loom so large while they last. Yet they are as a rule completely unnecessary, so easily could they be dispelled by understanding parents. As we grow up we tend to stifle our worries by concentrating our thoughts on more cheerful topics. But the effect of this is only temporary. A far better way is to get our earthly troubles in their eternal perspective. And the worldly success of the unworldly—Indian students and others will think of Gandhi—is a fact and feature of history.



I suppose that worry is just about the most universal of human ills. I ought to explain at once that by 'worry' I do not mean plans; I do not mean the care and precaution with which the general designs his campaign or the housewife to-morrow's meals. What I mean is secret and unnecessary and sterile anxiety over the outcome of plans,

or over troubles expected or, more often, imagined in the future.

I suppose not one in a thousand, even among the very young and the very old, is altogether immune. In fact, I suspect that children suffer almost as often from this secret unrest, and, though in a different mode, at least as agonizingly as their elders. I can remember when I was a small boy tiptoeing* repeatedly along the passage in the small hours—despite the eerie creaking of the floorboards, despite the solemn ticking of the passage clock—to listen at my parents' door in the hope of assuring myself that they had not died suddenly in the night. I was an unusually nervous child and I used to suppose that my sufferings were peculiar to myself, but in fact I suspect all children, even the gayest and most unimaginative, are tortured for a while at least by these secret terrors.

The anxieties of childhood are of shorter term,* so to speak, than those which afflict us, but fundamentally they are very similar, and in particular these troubles resemble ours in that they are so often wholly imaginary and so often suffered in secret. To the day of their death I doubt whether my parents knew of my stealthy visits to their door or what it always cost me to pass the head of the staircase and try desperately not to hear the sound of muffled movement coming up from the dark hall below. The truth is that in the nursery, as in later years, we are ashamed of our secret anxieties and certainly we do not as yet suspect that the proverb, 'A trouble shared is a trouble halved', is, if anything, an understatement.

It was not till the second year of the first world war that I first came to a definite conclusion and some sort of

definite policy about worry. It was my first night in the front-line trenches in Mesopotamia. The earth was hard and rather damp; the rifle-fire was continuous, and I found myself wondering whether I should be able to sleep at all that night. Obviously not, it seemed to me, if, in addition to all the other disturbances, I was going to be distracted by useless anxieties about to-morrow. For I was a mere subaltern. I had no plans to make, so that to dwell on the morrow would be mere useless and irrational worry. At all costs, I decided, for the rest of this war I will contrive to live in the present; and a familiar quotation presented itself to my memory: 'Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'* Clearly most admirable advice, but was I competent to take it? I lay down, determined to exclude the future as far as I could altogether from my thoughts. I concentrated, I remember, on imagining some engrossing and romantic adventure story. In less than five minutes I was asleep, and I slept soundly till dawn. It was the same all through my active service. I can remember lying down in the open one night with a nagging toothache and in a steady downpour of rain, and sleeping unbrokenly all the night through. Granted I was helped by being physically a good sleeper, but mental worry can keep even good sleepers awake, and I certainly seemed, for the time being at any rate, to have succeeded in dispelling that.

Not long after this I spent two and a half years as a prisoner of war in Asiatic Turkey. (I must apologize, by the way, for talking so much about myself, but then one

has no first-hand knowledge of any worries except one's own.) On the whole those two and a half years outside the world were surprisingly cheerful, and looking back I realize that I was pursuing the same policy—unconsciously I think, because I cannot remember ever deliberately resolving not to worry about when the war would end, whether we should ever get back, or what was happening at home (I was young then and not married). But I certainly did contrive to dispel these menacing shadows from my conscious mind, with the short-term result that my prisoner-of-war years, in their own queer way, were quite happy, and I eventually returned home apparently all the better for them.

I have noticed only two uncomfortable legacies from those years, but those, I think, are significant. One is a tendency to be irrationally disturbed if I am unexpectedly separated from one of my family. You probably know the feeling yourself. Your wife has promised to meet you at Paddington* in plenty of time for the train. She is five minutes late, and during those five minutes, you have probably had time to ring up Scotland Yard* and half a dozen hospitals, to discover that she has been run over by a car, to be rushed to her death-bed, to attend the inquest, and possibly even to arrange the details of the funeral.

The other symptom which lingered on for years was a recurrent nightmare in which I was a prisoner again and hopelessly and helplessly aware that the war was never going to end. That aftermath, I think, though fortunately comparatively trivial in my case, reveals the defects of the tactics with which I had been trying to suppress worry. I had not discovered the whole of the secret.

If you merely deliberately banish your anxieties from your consciousness, they will return later on, or in another guise, in your subconscious mind. You need to banish them, but not until you have first looked them unflinchingly in the eye.

I found that as I grew older there was plenty to worry about in peace time too. You marry, and you have children—and at once you have given hostages to fortune.* The imaginary accidents, the imaginary illnesses of those he loves, the various imaginary forms of bankruptcy—let alone, of course, all the far less numerous, genuine catastrophes with which the father of a family nowadays can torture himself, if he so pleases—are legion. Even if this were not so, the truth is, I am afraid, that those who are accustomed to worry will always find something to worry about. The event proves that your anxiety (about Jimmy's chest complaint) which has been overshadowing you for a month is completely baseless ; there is an hour or two of blessed relief, but your mind has come positively to need its accustomed ration of worry, and before the day is over, a new, once secondary anxiety (about the next instalment of income tax), has begun to nag just as insistently as did the old one. It is fatally easy to spend half one's waking hours worrying over things which are never going to happen.

The sovereign advice for worriers, it seems to me, comes, naturally enough, from the same source as that on which I had already more or less instinctively acted during the first war. Possibly you remember a passage in the New Testament in which Our Lord is sending off his disciples on their first missionary journey—a remarkably

tough assignment. You are missionaries, He said in effect; then concentrate on being missionaries. Don't worry about clothes or food or even where the next meal is coming from. And then follow the remarkable, the really astonishing words: 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.'

It is a matter of history that, in its immediate context, the advice not to worry about food or money and the rest of it worked extremely well. Briefed* in this manner the disciples preached most effectively, and no doubt all the more effectively for not being disturbed by what for them would have been altogether unnecessary anxieties. But what is much more striking is the justification, all through history, of that paradoxical promise—the promise that those who are even more unworldly—unworldly enough to think more of God and righteousness than of any of the affairs of this world—shall in fact be supremely effective in worldly affairs.

That surely is what has in fact happened throughout history. For who have been responsible for the great social advances of mankind? The earliest Christians, who revolutionized the moral standards of the Roman Empire; the great men who built the cathedrals in the Middle Ages; Cromwell* and his Puritans; Wilberforce* and the little group which brought about the abolition of slavery; Wesley* and his friends to whom, I suppose, it would not be difficult to trace back all the reform movements—political and economic as well—of the nineteenth century. All these, and others like them, were men who thought first and most and longest of another world, or,

to put it in another way, refused, not to make plans, but to worry, as we worry,* over the outcome of our plans, over the trials and tribulations, real and imaginary, of this world's to-morrows. (Cromwell, for example, drilled his troops, no doubt, and certainly kept his powder dry,* but he left the issue of his campaign, when he had planned it, to Providence.) And for that very reason, they were all permitted, or enabled, to be supremely effective in this world, to bring about the great, incontestable advances of mankind.

Here surely we have the formula which is missing in any mere resolve forcibly to banish superfluous anxieties from the mind. We need to banish them, certainly, but not while they still terrify us, not until we have seen them in their true and almost always insignificant proportions. And that means seeing them against the background of eternity, and the Everlasting Mercy. After which they may firmly, and safely, be banished for ever. Read a life of Wilberforce and you find the story of a man constantly exposed to exceptional trial and stress; then glance at a portrait of Wilberforce in old age, and you perceive a being of almost child-like gaiety and inner peace. Now you and I, it is true, are very far from possessing the spiritual resources of such a man. The fact remains that here, manifest for all to see, is the sovereign remedy at work; and we can at least apply it, up to the limits of our own capacity, to our own needs. For us, as beginners, when disposed to torture ourselves with the anxiety which leads nowhere and helps nobody—least of all ourselves—a simple formula might, I think, be to begin by repeating several times over to ourselves the refrain of the 136th

Psalm : ' For His mercy endureth for ever.' After this there can be no harm in expelling the superfluous irritant from our minds as deliberately as possible—no harm and very much less difficulty. After this the most nervous child may find it unnecessary to brave that midnight corridor and the solemn ticking of the passage clock.

NOTES

Lord Elton, b. 1892. Fellow of Queen's College, Oxford ; author of *St George or the Dragon* and many other books ; well-known broadcaster.

tiptoeing, walking on the tips of the toes.

of shorter term, i.e. not so much about the future.

'Take therefore . . .', from the Gospel according to St Matthew.

Paddington, one of the important London railway stations.

Scotland Yard, the headquarters in London of the Criminal Investigation Department.

hostages to fortune, a phrase from Bacon's essay, *Of Marriage and Single Life*: 'He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune.'

briefed, i.e. given their instructions.

Cromwell, 1599-1658. Leader of the Roundheads who fought against and beat Charles I. He afterwards became Lord Protector of England.

Wilberforce, 1759-1833.

John Wesley, 1703-91. Founder of Methodism.

refused, not . . ., i.e. did not refuse to make plans, but did refuse to worry. . .

kept his powder dry, a reference to a remark of Cromwell's before a battle: 'Put your trust in God, and keep your powder dry.'

EARL WAVELL

Living and Reading

Here is a great soldier-statesman's tribute to the value and pleasure he has derived from reading, and in particular from poetry. For students of war he emphasizes the supreme importance of those books which depict the human factor. Then, more generally, he lists some of his old favourites in history, biography, travel, and fiction. Books, he tells us, like friends, should be chosen with careful discrimination.



What part should reading play in our lives ? It should certainly not be a substitute for action, nor for independent thinking, nor for conversation ; but it may be a help and stimulant to action, thought and talk ; and it is capable of providing almost infinite pleasure. There on our bookshelves or on summons from a library are wit, wisdom, adventure, romance from all ages and all over the world. Is there any wonder that our eyes sometimes stray

wistfully to the bookshelves and away from a dull visitor, or that we shirk a tiresome duty for an exciting book?

Books or people? Reading or conversation—or, nowadays, listening to the radio? Which is the better way to gain knowledge or to spend your leisure? Some fortunate people seem always to find time for both and to enjoy both almost equally. My great friend, Arthur Wauchope,* a fine soldier, a most able administrator and a very gifted personality, was a constant reader, yet was always ready to lay aside a book for talk and was a most interesting and interested talker. My son has the same gift. It is a gift that I admire but do not always find easy to emulate. I think it is largely a matter of physical and mental make-up, whether reading or talking appeals more or is easier for one.

I know that my eye is far more effective to take in and grasp an idea or fact than is my ear. What catches my eye on the printed page seems to be televised instantaneously on to my brain and to produce usually a clear negative which can be developed by the brain into a more or less permanent record. What strikes my rather dull ear suffers quite an appreciable delay before it reaches the developing and printing chemicals of my brain, which must have laid a much better system of communications to my eye than to my ear. At least that is how I explain or excuse to myself my slowness of tongue and brain in conversation. But perhaps it is the result of early self-consciousness and diffidence. There is a family story that as a small boy I used on the approach of visitors to seize a book of poetry and retire under the dining-room table, where I would learn a poem by heart till the visitors had left.

The advantages of reading over talk are of course that

we can select the book that suits our mood—‘C to be grave with, D to be gay’—can go at our own pace, skip, or turn back, whereas we cannot turn over two pages of a tedious companion or close him, or her, with a bang. But reading lacks the human touch, the salt of life, and is therefore a dangerous substitute for thought or action. Bacon* in one of his essays says that reading maketh a full man; conference (that is talking) a ready man; and writing an exact man. One would like to be full of knowledge, ready in speech, and exact in expression. But that is given to few. I would call myself reasonably full—for a soldier—and fairly exact, by training. But full of what? What sort of reading has impressed itself on my memory, and what books have found a permanent place on my bookshelves?

To begin with my profession, soldiering. I do not believe that soldiering, a practical business, in which human nature is the main element, can be learnt from text-books, any more than can boxing or cricket or golf. ‘I wish you would make up your mind about John,’ the wife of an officer whose promotion to command of a battalion hung in the balance, once said plaintively to me: ‘He sits up all night now reading those horrid little red books* and I’m sure it isn’t good for him.’ She was right, I think; for her John, though a good fighting soldier, had no great headpiece for book-learning, and no study of text-books was likely to improve his leadership. But for those who have grasped the principles of war and have understood that the human factor is the most important element in it there is military reading that is fascinating and valuable.

'Read and re-read the campaigns of the great commanders,' said Napoleon. I would venture to put it differently and would say that the lives and characters of the great commanders are what students of war should examine, since their campaigns are only incidents in them; and that the behaviour of leaders and of their men in the field is the fittest subject for study. Take Napoleon's first campaign of 1796. The text-books will tell you that he won by manœuvre on interior lines or by the principle of concentration of force, or some similar conjuration. One learns nothing, I hold, by such dogma.

But if a student of war can discover by what methods a young unknown man impressed himself on older, more experienced commanders, tough and unimpressionable, as Masséna and Augereau* were, and on ragged, half-starved, mutinous troops; and made them march and fight as they had never marched and fought before, he will have learnt something worth knowing. He will not find it in text-books, but he may find something of that spirit in a book called *The Road to Glory* by the late Britten Austin.* It is the story of the birth of Napoleon's fame, told in the form of a novel but with the military facts accurate. I am quite sure that I learnt more of Napoleon's first campaign from that book than from the many more serious works on it. *Napoleon and his Marshals*, by A. G. Macdonell,* is another fascinating book on the Napoleonic legend, which illuminates the personality of this great band of warriors; it is a book I pick out frequently from its shelf and find hard to put back again. On the British side, Oman's *Wellington's Men** gives brilliant sketches of both leaders and men of the Peninsular War.*

Turn on a little to the American Civil War of 1861-5. There have been innumerable books on this war by military writers, but to my mind the one that best pictures the human factor and is therefore the most valuable for military students is a long epic poem called 'John Brown's Body' by the late Stephen Vincent Benét,* one of the very best of the American poets, whose untimely death a year or two ago was a great loss to all lovers of poetry.

I have mentioned only a very few of the military books on my shelves; and the point I am trying to make is that it is the human and not the mechanical side of war that is worth study. Methods of war change, and change very rapidly nowadays, but the factor of human nature changes little. So that my military bookshelves are filled with biography and history rather than text-books or works on strategy.

In my general reading, history, biography and travel occupy, I think, first place; and since I have spent a considerable proportion of my life in the East there are a good number of volumes on India and the Middle East. And for adventure and travel there are Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*,* with a rather tough, unpalatable outer rind but a very edible core; T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*,* one of the most magnificent pieces of prose in the language; and my own cousin's account* of his pilgrimage to Mecca in Arab disguise.

There is plenty of poetry on my shelves and a good deal of it is in my head. I have put my notions of poetry in a book already* and will not repeat them here, except to express my firm belief that poetry in some shape or another is one of the most precious of our heritages, and

that much of what tries to pass for poetry nowadays is not poetry at all, and not even decently camouflaged as such. Poetry should dance in the mind, and blow one a kiss; or gallop to adventure with a cheer; or whisper gently of sad things past; not shuffle or slouch past with dark incomprehensible mutterings. Perhaps I am getting old, anyway I prefer the old poets.

Lastly comes what is sometimes called 'escapist' literature, the books we read with no other aim than to rest or to amuse the mind, to forget the day's chores* and the morrow's anxieties. This is perhaps the most pleasant form of reading for most, and I suspect the only form of reading for many. The volume chosen may be either a thriller or a soother—a thriller to bring some sense of adventure into the dull daily routine or a soother to rest tired nerves. Our grandfathers in their leisurely days were content with the stately, comfortable three-volume novel, but that had passed before the beginning of this century. Kipling* wrote its epitaph in a poem called 'The Three-Decker',* of which I quote a stanza :

No moral doubt assailed us, so when the port we neared,
The villain had his flogging at the gangway, and we cheered.
'Twas fiddle in the foc's'le—'twas garlands on the mast,
For everyone got married, and I went ashore at last.
I left 'em all in couples a-kissing on the decks.
I left the lovers loving and the parents signing cheques.
In endless English comfort, by country-folk caressed,
I left the old three-decker at the Islands of the Blest !

Modern novels are more complicated and sophisticated than that. It shows how quickly we are travelling when the old Three-Decker is now replaced often by a speed-boat

of Peter Cheyney's,* armed to the teeth and full of liquor, bound apparently for Devil's Island. There was a reaction during the war to the older, simpler works, to Jane Austen and Trollope, to Victorian simplicity; a reaction from arsenic to old lace,* so to speak.

Here are just a few of my own favourites, one of which may be taken down at any time to pass an hour or two, since most of us still retain, I think, the childish love of hearing again and again a tale which has pleased us: *Mr Sponge's Sporting Tour*, the best of Surtees'* hunting novels; Samuel Butler's* fantasy, *Erewhon*; *Kidnapped*, by Robert Louis Stevenson; Marryat's* *Mr Midshipman Easy*; Hermann Melville's* extraordinary story of whale hunting, *Moby Dick*; Mark Twain's* *Tom Sawyer*; and almost any of Kipling's, especially *Puck of Pook's Hill* and the *Jungle Books*.

You will choose your books as you choose your friends, with taste and discrimination, I hope; because they can tell you something of your profession and interests, because they are wise and helpful, because they can stir your blood with their tales of adventure, or because they are gay and witty. I can only wish you will get as much pleasure from them as I have from my books.

NOTES

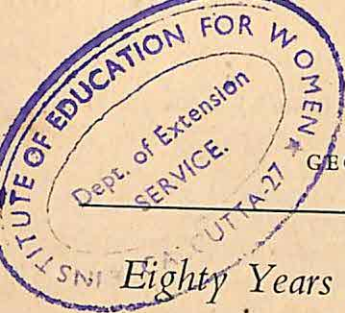
Earl Wavell, 1883-1950. He occupied, at various times, many high positions in the British Army, and has written several books. He was Viceroy and Governor-General of India from 1943 to 1947.

- General Sir Arthur Wauchope*, at one time High Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief in Palestine (1931-8).
- Francis Bacon*, 1561-1626. He was at one time Lord Chancellor of England.
- red books, military handbooks are often bound in red covers.
- Masséna*, 1758-1817. *Augereau*, 1757-1815.
- Britten Austin*, 1885-1941.
- A. G. Macdonell*, 1895-1941. A historian and humorous writer.
- Sir Charles Oman*, 1860-1947. Historian.
- Peninsular War*, war in Spain and Portugal against Napoleon (1808-14).
- Stephen Vincent Benét*, 1898-1943.
- Charles Doughty*, 1843-1926. Writer and explorer.
- T. E. Lawrence*, 1888-1935. A soldier, explorer and scholar. He is often called 'Lawrence of Arabia'.
- my own cousin's account*, *A. J. B. Wavell* (1882-1916) in his *A Modern Pilgrim in Mecca*.
- in a book already, *Other Men's Flowers* (1944).
- chores, routine tasks, especially housework.
- Rudyard Kipling*, 1865-1936. Poet, novelist and short story writer.
- A three-decker* is an old sailing warship with three decks. Kipling uses the term to refer both to the warship and to the three-volume novel.
- Peter Cheyney*, 1896-1951. A prolific writer of modern thrillers.
- arsenic to old lace*, the reference is to a play in which two respectable old ladies (who wear *old lace*) murder people by using *arsenic*.
- R. S. Surtees*, 1803-64. A writer of novels about sport, especially fox-hunting.
- Samuel Butler*, 1835-1902.

Frederick Marryat, 1792-1848. A well-known novelist of life at sea.

Hermann Melville, 1819-91.

Mark Twain, pen name of Samuel Clemens, 1835-1910. American humorous writer.



Eighty Years Preparing for an Exam

All students know, and most have reason to detest, examinations. But all will agree that modern examinations have become a great deal more tolerable and sensible and valuable than they were, as this amusing account describes, in China before the Revolution of 1911. Yet even to-day the problem still remains of devising an examination that will not give undue weight to mere booklearning or power of verbal memory.



At the Foochow examinations of 1882 the Grand Examiner conducted the proceedings with the usual decorum until the third day, when suddenly his Excellency's reason gave way. He tore up a number of the essays handed in, and scattered the pieces flying all over the dais appropriated to his use. He rushed down among the candidates who were just leaving, and bit and cuffed everybody who came in his way until finally secured by

order of the assistant examiner and bound hand and foot in his chair.

This spirited scene took place at a civil service examination—not in Britain, but in China. Such losses of poise were less frequent among the examiners than among the candidates. For them the occasion which lasted nine days was one of tremendous strain. To reach the examination at all might have taken anything from twelve to seventy-five years of study. To pass meant public applause and the chance of honour and wealth. To fail meant shaking of heads among the neighbours, no official career, and possibly ending one's days as a schoolmaster, underpaid and disgruntled.

The China I am talking about ceased to exist before I was born. It is the China where representative government and the internal combustion engine were unheard of, still more so communism or the atom bomb. This was the China before the Revolution of 1911—the year old China officially ended and history began again with year One of the Republic. While Karl Marx was unknown, everyone was familiar with Confucius.* China led the world in devotion to learning and also in the size of its civil service, the world's oldest and largest.

Chinese reverence for learning went far beyond normal respect for men of education. This was partly through the authority of great teachers like Confucius and Mencius.* Also because years of study were needed before a man could learn to read them. After he could read, he was in a position to embark on a further painful course of works telling what the classics meant. All this put the ordinary man who could not read at all in a mild state of awe. The

emperor himself respected the country's most eminent scholars.

To know the writings of the great teachers became the first qualification for the public service, and the examinations developed accordingly. They were started about A.D. 600 and continued on broadly the same lines for 1,300 years, being officially discontinued in 1906. The ideal was to find not merely men who knew the classics, but men who would also practise and uphold the virtue the classics taught. The perfect civil servant would combine the functions of nobleman and priest. Some did. But like anywhere else China was full of sardonic jokes about mandarins.* The consequence of all this was that the civil service examinations developed in a direction and on a scale never paralleled anywhere else.

Examinations, it should be said, were not the only way into the public service. The international methods of family influence, obliging members of the administration, and outright purchase ran alongside. However, those who had studied their way in despised those who had bought their way in. Theoretically it was possible for almost any Chinese boy with brains and industry to become Prime Minister. To enter by examination was an honour. It stamped you as a man of learning in a country where learning was deeply venerated. Also it gave you some of the standing that international footballers get in England. To pass meant you had won a competition with a strong sporting flavour.*

The British civil service considers a man's personality very important. Candidates spend three days at official house parties.* They are watched and brooded over by

psychiatrists. The Chinese on the other hand showed no interest in what kind of person the entrant was—they did not mind if he was a hundred years old. They could not even get a line* from his handwriting. To prevent an examiner favouring someone whose writing he recognized, all papers were copied out by official scribes. All the examiners cared about was first how much a man knew about the set books, then if he could express himself in what was thought high literary style.

At the age of six or seven boys started two primers—the *Three Character Classic* and the *Thousand Character Essay*. There is a story that the *Thousand Character Essay* was written by a man in prison, ordered to produce a poem from a thousand miscellaneous characters. He succeeded in one night and by the morning his hair was white. There were a few other elementary books, and after the boy had learned them by heart and copied them out many times he would know a lot of assorted characters. Now he could proceed to the set books.

There were two qualifying rounds before the examinations proper. Also each candidate had to prove that his great-grandfather, grandfather or father had not been an executioner or an actor or engaged in certain other degrading occupations. One of these was barber, and the barbers of Hupeh once went on strike because the brilliant son of a barber was disqualified in the examination. For the two qualifying rounds the books were the *Book of Wisdom*, 'intended to illustrate illustrious virtue'; then the *Doctrine of the Mean*, said to have been written by a grandson of Confucius; third, the *Discourses of Confucius*; and, fourth, the *Discourses of Mencius*. These four

books had to be learned by heart. Otherwise the candidate had no hope of passing, unless he managed to smuggle in some miniature editions.

Once through the qualifying rounds, the indispensable books were those known as the Five Canons. First, the *Book of Changes*, a very mysterious system of philosophy which Confucius himself could not explain; two books by Confucius; a book of poetry collected by Confucius; and, lastly, the *Book of Rites*.

The first important examination was for the Bachelor's Degree. Passing this examination gave the right to wear official dress of the lowest rank of the civil service, including a gilt button on top of the cap. It also, however, exempted a man from being sentenced to a beating either as a prisoner or as a witness. However, if it was felt that he really had to be beaten the procedure was to deprive him of his degree and then carry on with the bamboo strokes. Incidentally, the civil service button on the cap went from gilt in the lowest level to ruby for a first-grade civilian. But passing the examination did not give a man a government job automatically. It simply qualified him to take one, if he could buy or talk one out of* the local mandarins in control of departments.

Then came the Master's Degree, which was held yearly in the capital of each province. For this there were three bouts of three days each, making nine in all. The candidates were put up in cells lining long alleys—at Peking there were 10,000 cells. The entrants were locked in with the examiners until each three days ended. The only way to leave earlier was by dying, when the body was hoisted over the wall as a routine. The sitter brought his

own food, ink and pens. His basket, clothes and the thick soles of his shoes were vigorously searched for small editions of the books. The punishment for smuggling in cribs was heavy, but it went on. There was once an attempt to stop the printing of miniature editions, but it failed. Writing paper was provided and it was forbidden to soil it or tear it. However, candidates were often disqualified for doodling* drawings or meaningless phrases. Others were still more powerfully affected. To call a man a turtle or child of a turtle is pretty coarse* abuse in China. One student put nothing on his paper but a huge drawing of a turtle and underneath it, 'Call me this if you catch me here again !' Others hanged themselves in their cells or cut their throats. Some made their wills or handed in blank papers. This meant the loss of whatever degrees they had already.

The importance of knowing the books by heart was that the questions were set in the form of quotations from these works written thousands of years before, and a man who did not know where the quotation came from was sunk* in advance. A typical question was : write an essay on 'This rule of conferring honours on three generations of ancestors was extended to the princes, great officers, scholars and people'; or write an essay on: 'The Marquis of Ch'i, the Duke of Sung, the Marquis of Ch'in, the Marquis of Wei and the Earl of Ch'ing had a meeting at Kuen.' There were also questions on the holy books, ancient history and old works on agriculture—almost nothing practical or present-day. The essays had to be written to a fixed number of words in a set and artificial style. They were called eight-legged essays.

Those who passed the provincial examinations could then enter for the metropolitan examinations at Peking. Entrants for these aroused as much enthusiasm as a small-town team doing well in the English Cup.* To finance the expensive journey, there were public subscriptions, advances from friends, and loans by pawnbrokers. The names of the successful were proclaimed by heralds. Feasting, processions and firework displays took place in their home towns. The top three from 8,000 or 9,000 competitors were the heroes of China.

When a man actually became a civil servant he was underpaid. To increase his income he had to use his position to make what he could. However, provided the amount he took on the side was reasonable no one complained. In fact this was expected, and even though he was practising mild extortion he could still fulfil the Confucian ideal of the superior man which he had studied so long. Chinese history is full of statesmen who suffered mutilation, imprisonment or being degraded to running government wine shops, rather than betray the principles they had studied for the examinations. Nor were these principles chopped off short in the 1911 Revolution. 'I am a scholar; he is a money-grabber,' says to-day's civil servant whose whole family lives in one room, talking of the racketeer* with an enormous villa. The teaching of Confucius still goes through the thinking of Chinese to-day. Indeed there are ingenious explanations that Confucius does not conflict with Marx.

Finally a word on the examinations as they were. A candidate might pass at eighteen or ninety. He might have spent eighty years preparing. There were many

instances of grandfather, father and son appearing at the same competition. Whatever his age the public had the reasons for success summed up. In order of importance they were : (1) luck, (2) predestination, (3) influence exerted by propitious site of family grave, (4) good deeds done in secret, (5) study.

NOTES

George Begley has been a journalist and now writes 'copy' for an advertising agency. Speaks and reads Chinese, Malay, Hindi, Urdu, and Gurkhali. Lived for a time in Malaya and has been in a Gurkha regiment.

Confucius, 550-478 B.C. Chinese philosopher.

Mencius, about 370-290 B.C.

mandarin, Chinese high official.

sporting flavour, i.e. in which luck played a part.
house parties, in which efforts are made to estimate the candidate's personality apart from his mere book-learning.

get a line, i.e. gain any information about the candidate.

talk one out of, argue his case so convincingly that at last the mandarin appointed him.

doodling, idly scribbling.

pretty coarse, very coarse.

was sunk, i.e. failed.

English Cup, each year the leading English football teams compete for a Cup. Many Englishmen are very enthusiastic about this competition, particularly when a little-known team beats a famous one.

racketeer, man who earns a lot of money by clever, but disreputable, business practices.

PETER FLEMING

An Ammunition Train in Greece

This is the tale of an extremely odd adventure which occurred in Greece during the Second World War. It describes how a very amateur engine-driver, with one or two others to help, tried to drive a long railway train, loaded with ammunition and petrol, through country exposed to hostile attack. The enterprise—in a way—succeeded, though the train was soon afterwards blown up. The chatty and amusing way in which the story is told does not disguise the courage shown.



I forget which of us it was who found the ammunition train. There were two of them, as a matter of fact, lying forlornly in a railway siding outside the town of Larissa. Larissa in the great empty plain of Thessaly was our main supply base in northern Greece, from which, in April 1941, we were withdrawing under heavy German pressure.

The town had been bombed by the Italians, then it had been badly damaged by an earthquake, and now it was receiving regular attention from the Luftwaffe.* It was an awful mess. The Greek railway staff had run away and it was pretty obvious that the two ammunition trains had been abandoned. I knew that we were seriously short of ammunition farther down the line, so I went to the Brigadier in charge of the base and asked permission to try to get one of the trains away. It was given with alacrity.

I don't want you to think that this action on my part was public-spirited, or anything like that. My motives were purely selfish. We wanted a job. We were a small unit which had been carrying out various irregular activities* farther north; but now the sort of tasks for which we were designed had become impossible, and we were in danger of becoming what civil servants call redundant.* We felt that if we could get this train away we should be doing something useful and justifying our existence. Besides, one of us claimed that he knew how to drive an engine.

This was Norman Johnstone, a brother officer in the Grenadier Guards. One of our jobs earlier in the campaign had been to destroy some rolling-stock which could not be moved away. Norman had a splendid time blowing up about twenty valuable locomotives and a lot of trucks, but towards the end we ran out of explosives. At this stage a sergeant in the 4th Hussars turned up, who was an engine-driver in civilian life. With Norman helping him, he got steam up in the four surviving engines, drove them a quarter of a mile down the line, then sent them

full tilt* back into the station where they caused further havoc of a spectacular and enjoyable kind.

These were perhaps not ideal conditions under which to learn how to drive an engine, especially as the whole thing was carried out under shell-fire; and all we really knew for certain about Norman's capabilities as an engine-driver was that every single locomotive with which he had been associated had become scrap metal in a matter of minutes. Still, he is a very determined and a very methodical chap, and there seemed no harm in letting him have a go.* So early in the morning we made our way to the railway station, just in time for the first air-raid of the day. Except for occasional parties of refugees and stragglers from the Greek Army the station was deserted. There were two excellent reasons for this. First of all there were no trains running, so there was no point in anybody going there anyhow. Secondly, the station was practically the only thing left in the ruins of Larissa that was worth bombing; we had ten air-raids altogether before we left in the afternoon, and they always had a go at the station.

The first thing we had to do was to get steam up in a railway engine. There were plenty of these about, but all except two had been rendered unserviceable by the Luftwaffe. We started work on the bigger of the two. After having a quick look round, Norman explained to us that one of the most popular and probably in the long run the soundest of all methods of making steam was by boiling water, but, he said, we might have to devise some alternative formula as the water mains had been cut by bombs and there was very little coal to be found. However, in

the long run we got together enough of these two more or less essential ingredients, and all was going well when one of the few really large bombs that came our way blew a hole in the track just outside the shed we were working in, thus, as it were, locking the stable door before we had been able to steal the horse.* Greatly disgusted, we transferred our attention to the other sound engine.

There were more air-raids, and it came on to rain, and two Greek deserters stole my car, and altogether things did not look very hopeful, especially when somebody pointed out that there was now only one undamaged and navigable set of tracks leading out of the battered marshalling yard. But the needle on the pressure-gauge in the cabin of our engine was rising slowly, and at last, whistling excitedly, the ancient machine got under way. It was a majestic sight, and it would have been even more majestic if she had not gone backwards instead of forwards.

It was at this point that a certain gap in Norman's education as an engine-driver became evident. The sergeant in the 4th Hussars had taught him how to start a locomotive and how to launch it on a career of self-destruction; but Norman's early training in how to stop an engine had been confined entirely to making it run violently into a lot of other rolling stock. We trotted anxiously along the cinders,* hanging, so to speak, on to Norman's stirrup leathers. 'Do you know how to stop?' we shouted. 'Not yet,' replied Norman, a trifle testily. But he soon found out and presently mastered the knack of making the engine go forward as well as backwards,

and we steamed rather incredulously northwards towards the siding where the ammunition trains lay.

We chose the bigger of the two. It consisted of twenty-six trucks containing 120 tons of ammunition and 150 tons of petrol. It was not what you might call an ideally balanced cargo from our point of view, and nobody particularly wanted the petrol, but the train was made up like that and we had to lump it.*

It really was rather a proud moment when we steamed back through Larissa with this enormous train clattering along behind us, and out into the broad plain of Thessaly. Norman drove, the stoker was Oliver Barstow—a young officer in the Royal Horse Artillery who was killed a few days later—and Guardsman Loveday and I, armed with our only tommy-gun, prepared to engage any hostile aircraft who might be so foolhardy as to come within range. It was a lovely evening, and we all felt tremendously pleased with ourselves. Driving a train, once you had got the beastly thing started, seemed to be extraordinarily easy. No steering, no gear-changing, no problems of navigation, no flat tyres, none of those uncomfortable suspicions that perhaps after all you ought to have taken that last turning to the left. There's nothing in it, we told each other. I am afraid we were suffering from what Stalin once called 'dizziness from success'.

Almost as soon as we had left Larissa we had begun to climb up a long, gentle slope; and we had only done about five miles when the needle on the pressure-gauge began slowly but firmly to fall. We stoked like mad. Norman pulled, pushed and twiddled the various devices on what we quite incorrectly called the dashboard.

Pressure continued to fall, and the train went slower and slower. At last it stopped altogether. 'We'd better get out', said Norman, 'and have a look at the injector-sprockets.' He may not actually have said 'injector-sprockets', but anyhow it was some technical term which meant nothing to us and may not have meant a very great deal to him. It was at this point that we realized that the train had not merely stopped but was beginning to run slowly backwards down the hill. The thought of free-wheeling backwards into Larissa was distasteful to all of us. In the hurry of departure we had had no time to organize our ten brakemen, who were all confined in the guard's van instead of being dispersed along the train so that they could operate the brakes on individual goods wagons. There was only one thing to do. I leapt off the engine and ran back down the train as fast as I could, like an old lady running for a bus: jumped on the back of the nearest goods van, swarmed up a little ladder on to its roof and feverishly turned the wheel which put the brake on. The train continued to go backwards, but it seemed to have stopped gathering speed and at last, after I had repeated this operation several times, it came reluctantly to a stop.

We were really getting a great deal of fun out of this train. We had got a tremendous kick* out of starting it, and now we were scarcely less elated at having brought it to a standstill. But we had to face the facts, and the main fact was that as engine-drivers, though we had no doubt some excellent qualities—originality, determination, cheerfulness, and so on—we were open to the serious criticism that we did not seem to be able to drive our

engine very far. A run of five miles, with a small discount for going backwards unexpectedly, is not much to show for a hard day's work. At this point, moreover, it suddenly began to look as if we were going to lose our precious train altogether. As we tinkered away at the engine, the air grew loud with an expected but none the less unwelcome noise, and a number of enemy bombers could be seen marching through the sky towards us. We were a very conspicuous object in the middle of that empty plain and I quickly gave orders for the ten men in the guard's van to go and take cover* 500 yards from the train. In point of fact there was no cover to take, but they trotted off with alacrity and sat down round a small tree about the size of a big gooseberry bush in the middle distance. We couldn't very well leave the engine because the fire might have gone out (or anyhow we thought it might) and we should have had to start all over again.

But if we had our troubles the enemy, as so often happens, had his too. The bombers were obviously interested in us, but it soon became equally obvious that they had no bombs, having wasted all theirs on the ruins of Larissa earlier in the day. They still, however, had their machine-guns and three or four of the aircraft proceeded to attack us, coming in very low one after the other. But they all made the same mistake, which they might not have made if we ourselves had taken evasive action and left the train. They all attacked the engine, round which they could see signs of life, instead of flying up and down the twenty-odd wagons full of petrol and H.E.* and spraying them with bullets, which could hardly have failed to produce spectacular results. They concentrated on putting

the engine out of action; and the engine, as we ourselves were just beginning to realize, was out of action already, all the water in the boiler having somehow disappeared.

We used the engine in much the same way as one uses a grouse-butt.* Whichever side the attack was coming from, we got the other side. The flying-machine, making a terrible noise and blazing away with its machine-guns, swept down on us and as it roared overhead—much bigger, much more malevolent but not really very much higher than the average grouse—we pooped off* at it with our tommy-gun, to which the German rear-gunner replied with a burst that kicked up the dust a hundred yards away or more. It got rather silly after a bit. I am quite sure we never hit the Luftwaffe, and the only damage the Luftwaffe did to us was to make a hole in a map somebody had left in the cab. And one of the things about driving a train is that you don't need a map to do it with. They gave it up quite soon—it was getting late anyhow—and went home to Bulgaria. We climbed back into our engine again and as I looked at our only casualty—the map, torn by an explosive bullet and covered with coal dust—I couldn't help rather envying the Luftwaffe, who almost certainly believed that they had succeeded in doing what they set out to do. It was only too obvious that we had not. Night fell, and it was fairly cold.

Then, all of a sudden, out of the darkness, another train appeared. It was full of Australian gunners whose guns were supposed to have come on by road. They towed us back to the next station. Here we picked up a good engine with a Greek driver and set off for the south.

It was ideal weather all next day—pouring rain and low cloud—and we never saw a German aeroplane at all. Forty-eight hours after we had started work on this unlikely project we reached our—or rather the ammunition's—destination. It was a place called Amphykleion and here I formally handed over the train—twenty-six coaches, 150 tons of petrol, 120 tons of ammunition—to the supply people. Everyone was delighted with it. 'This really will make a difference,' they said. We felt childishly pleased. The sun shone, it was a lovely morning. And this marked improvement in the weather made it comparatively easy for a small force of German dive-bombers, a few hours later, to dispose of the train and all its contents with a terrible finality.

So you see this is not a success story. Nor is it a story which can have—from me, at any rate—a moral; for the only possible moral anyone can draw from it is that human endeavour is always likely to be futile, that it is better to leave ammunition trains in their sidings. And I hope the nonsense I have talked here has not included anything as nonsensical as that.

NOTES

Peter Fleming, b. 1907. He has written several books of travel, and has acted as correspondent for London newspapers.

Luftwaffe, the German Air Force.

irregular activities, i.e. guerilla warfare.

redundant, superfluous; a civil servant is liable to dismissal if the work for which he has been appointed no longer exists.

full tilt, at full speed.

have a go, make an attempt, try.

locking the stable door . . ., the reference is to a proverb, used of people who act too late: 'locking the stable door after the horse has been stolen.'

the cinders, i.e. those on which the railway line is laid.

lump it, make the best use of what was available.

a tremendous kick, much pleasure.

take cover, hide.

H.E., short for High Explosive.

grouse-butt, mound behind which men hide as grouse are driven towards them to shoot at. They hide on the opposite side to that from which the grouse are flying.

pooped off, i.e. shot at it from time to time.

P. H. NEWBY

The World of Imagination

The speaker here analyses and justifies his love of novel-reading. The novelist, he points out, is concerned above all with the delineation of character. By the power of his imagination he introduces us to, and enables us to understand, many and very different kinds of people. Novel-reading in fact stimulates in us this same power of imagination: we identify ourselves in turn with all these diverse folk. In this way our sympathies are broadened and intensified: we detect our common humanity in them all.



I was coming out of a library some time ago with a couple of books under my arm when I was stopped by a man who looked, to say the least of it, rather strange. He was wearing sandals, a very long, very ancient overcoat, and his grey hair came down to his shoulders. He pointed to the books I was carrying. His eyes gleamed prophetically.

‘What literature’, he demanded, ‘do you think will be read in heaven?’ He didn’t wait for an answer, even if I had been able to give one. Instead he pushed a religious tract into my hand and went on his way.

I read the tract there and then. It was not very long and it was not very interesting. Probably it said something about Doom and Judgement, but it certainly said nothing on the one point on which I required instruction; what literature will, indeed, be read in heaven? I would have gone further. What literature will be *written* in heaven, I should have liked to ask. But who could give me an answer?

There is a great deal of evidence to encourage the musicians. We hear* of trumpets and harps and angelic choirs in the hereafter. Presumably, too, the architects will have something to do. But what about the writer? The only heavenly writer about whom we appear to have any certain information is the Recording Angel—and his work can hardly be called creative! No, literature has no place in heaven. It is, as someone has said, one of the happier consequences of the Fall of Man;* its subject is the folly, the weakness and the downright wickedness of human beings. Even the most visionary of poets would have nothing to say in a perfect world—for what are visions but protests, and what power have these visions save in contrast with the state of existence as we know it? As for the writer of novels, as for him, poor misguided fellow, he would be quite lost, he would probably cry out against the dullness of a place where all problems were solved and fall to maundering* about the ‘good old days’.

I have been an insatiable reader of novels ever since I

can remember, and it was disconcerting to realize there would be no more of them at the dawning of the millenium. They are the most 'earthy' of all forms of literature; they tell us about the world as it is, not as it should be, the characters are seldom beasts and never angels (at least, this is the case in the kind of novels I like); they are usually that uneasy mixture of the two which makes up the general run of humanity. I was always fascinated by character. I felt I could never know enough about it—and what better teachers were there than the great writers of the past?

Like ninety-nine out of a hundred, my imagination is stirred and my enthusiasm aroused not by ideas or theories but by character, by the spectacle of men and women revealing themselves in love and anger, in dreams and schemes, in hope and in despair. I wanted to get as close to people as I possibly could, and my experience has been that the great writer puts us into intimate touch with one another more successfully than any other force, except love itself, with which we have to do. 'Here is Mr Tom Jones,' he says, 'very handsome, very successful with the ladies, he has any number of faults no doubt, but he's generous-minded, manly—and, what's more, he's flesh and blood and you're flesh and blood too and you ought to have a great deal to say to one another.'

The writer is able to create characters of flesh and blood like Tom Jones because of his insight, the range of his experience and the power of his imagination; and we, as readers, have to exercise our imagination too if the meeting with Mr Jones is to be as profitable as it should be. We see more, I believe, by the light of imagination than with

the help of any other human faculty—than reason, for example, which can so easily be heartless and play us false. 'A man to be greatly good', said Shelley,* 'must imagine intensively and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own.' The novelist is, by the very nature of his job, committed to just this; he must, in Shelley's words, put himself in the place of many others, of the characters he writes about, and we who read will inevitably have to do the same.

I mentioned Tom Jones a moment ago, the hero of Henry Fielding's novel of that name which was first published two hundred years ago. This reminds me that until I was about eighteen my deepest personal relations were not with the real-life people who surrounded me but with the characters of fiction. When I was a boy my family lived in the Worcestershire village of Upton, a very pleasant place surrounded by plum orchards on the right bank of the River Severn. Now the novel *Tom Jones* has particular associations with 'the famous town of Upton', as Fielding calls it; some of its scenes (and those among the most memorable in the book) are set there. It was natural, then, that as a boy I should be particularly interested in the novel. As it happens, I did not re-read *Tom Jones* until last year, and as I read I was struck by the fact that I remembered Tom Jones's adventures in Upton in greater detail than I remembered my own. In comparison with all the quite imaginary people of the novel, the twentieth-century flesh and blood inhabitants of Upton were almost shadows.

You might say this is a very undesirable state of affairs. It means that I was substituting a make-believe world for the real world I was living in, which is one (though possibly the pleasantest) of the many ways of going mad. However, it is all a question of degree. *Tom Jones* is, of all novels, one of the least likely to unbalance anyone, even the most suggestible, and I can see now that my first reading of it marked quite an important point in my life. From that moment onwards the characters of fiction came stepping out of their printed books and bore down upon me—Uncle Toby, Elizabeth Bennet, Mr Micawber, Emma Bovary*—they initiated me into all sorts of mysteries I should never have penetrated for myself, they gave that confirmation (of which many are in need, especially when young) that we are not alone but one of many millions, and that we are not unique, or peculiar, or strange, because everyone is unique and everyone is peculiar and everyone is strange. In some curious way I was, I think, reading for a kind of reassurance. I was very conscious of being the kind of person I was and there were times I was filled with real fear there might be no one else quite like me. And of course there is not and I did not come across myself in any of the books I was reading, but what I did find was an emphasis upon the diversity of humanity with the added implication that in a world so varied there was certainly a place for me.

But unless there is something unsatisfactory about our lives we do not go on reading novels in quite this way. We are caught up in our own lives, we fall in love, we marry, we are less bewildered and we know from our

own experience we are very like the rest of the world. And then it is, perhaps, that a hard, unsympathetic crust forms over the imagination. I have often wondered why it is that as people get older so they tend to read fewer works of imagination and more books about facts. The golden age for reading novels seems to be from about fifteen to twenty-three; after that, those who do any reading at all seem much happier with the books they get out of the library with their non-fiction tickets;* biography, history, travel and so on. It certainly is not because they have read all the novels worth reading. The explanation partly lies, no doubt, in one of the purest of human motives: the desire for knowledge. Yet there is, I suspect, a more or less deliberate damping down of the fires of the imagination. After all, imagination is a most uncomfortable possession.

If every living mortal but one on the face of the earth were well-fed and in good health the ideally imaginative person would not be able to sleep quietly in his bed for the thought of the one child, on the other side of the world perhaps, dying of starvation. Fortunately, no one could have an imagination like this, but we have all got some share of it and there are times when (especially in this twentieth century of ours) the individual feels he would be much happier if he had about as much imagination as an old boot. To read a novel (I mean a great novel, one by Dostoevsky,* say) is to get the dying battery of the imagination recharged, and that is what more and more of us, out of a kind of self-defence, are refusing to do. It means not only that we are less sensitive to other people's distress, it also means we lose our sense of wonder,

our ability to climb the mountains of the spirit and shout for joy.

I mention Dostoevsky because for me, more than any other novelist, he has just this power to kindle the imagination. Of one thing I am sure : that if novels are to mean anything more to us than amusement or the providing of pleasant little dream worlds into which we can escape, this is the man, Dostoevsky, to whom they will inexorably lead us. Probably there is no other writer who, in our present state of anarchy, it is more illuminating to read. And yet I am far from being sure that I understand him. I only know that I am ready to read him again and again. His novels bewilder, they exhilarate, they endlessly fascinate. They take us into a world of tumult, pain, exaltation, insanity and vicious logic; that is to say they take us into just such another world as the one in which we live.

No, not quite the same world for there is an important difference. The real world may defeat us, it may break our hearts because (selfish creatures that we are) we so easily forget we are not the only ones to be defeated or have our hearts broken. In the real world so many of us live alone. But in the world of Dostoevsky's imagination this selfishness is one of the first things he takes from us. A great tide of the spirit comes flooding in, filling the lagoons, the creeks, the little estuaries of the mind. This spirit reminds us of our common humanity, it gives us a profound apprehension of our common inheritance of mind and body with all other men and women, whoever they may be, the worst as well as the best, the rogues as well as the saints, those who are against us (the enemy) as well as those who are for us.

Dostoevsky has a great deal to say about 'the enemy'—the man in revolt, the criminal, the murderer. In his novel *Crime and Punishment*, for example, there is a man called Raskolnikov. In many ways Raskolnikov is a gentle creature, yet he murders to assert his will power, and although he may sound preposterous when I state the fact in a few simple words he is anything but preposterous when we meet him in the novel. He expresses some disturbing reality about the world we live in. We are not repelled. On the contrary, we are profoundly moved. Let me quote Shelley once more: 'A man to be greatly good must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own. The great instrument of moral good is the imagination.' What this means, I suppose, is that although we do not get confused in our ideas of what is right and what is wrong, that the Raskolnikovs of the world are indeed the enemies, we also discover that they are not merely 'other people'. They are also ourselves.

And here, in this sense of identity with the best and worst of men lies one of the secrets of literature. It is a reason, I believe, why (even when it deals with the most terrible of subjects as in the novels of Dostoevsky) great art is never oppressive. It does not beat us into miserable little corners where we skulk and glower over our own private misfortunes; it lifts us up to a point of splendour where there is no such thing as an individual sorrow or even an individual guilt, but only a holy sense of the thread of common humanity which runs through each and every one of us.

NOTES

P. H. Newby, b. 1918. Formerly a Lecturer in English Literature at Fouad 1^{er} University, Cairo. He has written books of travel and biographies.

we hear, i.e. we read in the Bible.

Fall of Man, man's lapse from perfection to sin as described in the Bible, because of Adam's disobedience to God's commands.

maundering, i.e. talking and dreaming about the past.

Percy Bysshe Shelley, 1792-1822. English poet.

Uncle Toby, *Elizabeth Bennet*, *Mr Micawber*, *Emma Bovary*, characters in four well-known novels: Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield*, and Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, respectively.

non-fiction tickets, in the Public Libraries in England, which can be used without payment, a reader is given four tickets with each of which he may take out one book. Two of these tickets can only be used for books that are not fiction.

Dostoevsky, 1821-81. Russian novelist, author of *Crime and Punishment*.

LORD BEVERIDGE

British Adventure in India

Lord Beveridge called this account of his parents' work in India 'a record of service'. Remembering their example, he appeals to all young men animated by a spirit of adventure to devote themselves to such selfless service, taking their special qualifications wherever exists the greatest need and scope for them.



A few weeks ago I listened, as you may have done, to a broadcast called 'Bengal Lights'. The broadcast was based on the description of his time in India given by William Hickey who went there 180 years ago as a cadet of the East India Company and long after wrote an outspoken, racy account of his life. The broadcast said a good deal, as Hickey himself did, about the amount of alcohol that he consumed in Bengal, and may have given the impression that the main difference and incompatibility

between British and Indian ways of life was that the British had drinking as a master passion, while the Indians in the mass were then, as they are now, abstemious. That would not be a fair picture. The eighteenth century, particularly in some sections of the then ruling wealthy class, had some ugly features. William Hickey describes his life as a young man about town in England with the same frankness as he applies to his time in India; if you took him as typical, you would think that dicing and drinking were the principal occupations of the British then. They were not typical then of any but a limited class and they disappeared largely when Victoria came.

In speaking now of the British in India I am not concerned with Hickey's time there nor with the rule of the East India Company. That Company was a trading adventure which, in the days of Clive and Warren Hastings and Dalhousie,* developed to its own surprise into an Empire. The Company was also a way to great wealth for some—the Nabobs,* as they came to be called—and a convenient means of finding jobs for sons and nephews of its directors and their friends. But all that sort of thing came to an end about a hundred years ago.

At that time a band of reformers in Britain were getting rid of patronage in the Civil Service at home by the device of competitive examination, examination open to all clever young men without nomination or regard to their families. These reformers applied the same device to India and thus laid the foundations of a Civil Service there which has had few if any equals for ability, responsibility, integrity and devotion. My father was one of the earliest of this new class of young Britishers in India—the

'competition wallahs'* as they were called by the sons and nephews of the old dispensation. In 1857 he sat for the third of the new examinations, came out top, went to India at twenty and spent thirty-five years there. He was no Nabob and he made no wealth. His tastes throughout life were of the simplest, with no extravagances except that of helping others, yet when on his death I came to administer his will, I found that after all those years of service and earning, he had died worth exactly £82.

He would no doubt have been more prosperous if he had not been always a bit of a revolutionary. From the beginning of the British adventure in India, it had been held by many of the leading figures in it—Macaulay* among others—that the essential purpose of our being in India was to prepare her people for self-government, and so to bring about our own departure. But most even of those who had this purpose were inclined to go slowly. My father on the other hand wanted to go as fast as possible, not as slowly as possible, in meeting Indian aspirations. He did not think, indeed, seventy years ago, that we ought to leave India at once. 'Granted,' he said, 'that we wrongfully got possession of India, still to abandon her now would be to act like a man-stealer who should kidnap a child, and then in a fit of repentance abandon him in a tiger-jungle.' But he wanted to take practical steps to hasten our going. As one immediate step he suggested that nearly all judicial posts in India should be filled by Indians. As another, he proposed transfer of the competitive examinations in the Service from England to India, so as to break what he called the 'geographical

monopoly' of the English. 'India', he said, 'has now a sufficient supply of educated young men within her borders, and need not import administrators, except for special purposes.' Talking like that, eighty years ago, my father was before his time and was regarded naturally as a dangerous man. He was never promoted to the top of his service, and was sent almost always to unpopular districts. That is how I came to be born in a swamp, in what a contemporary of my father described as 'the dismal station of Rangpur'. Friends who came to dine with my parents at Rangpur said that they always expected to meet a cobra on the veranda.

But my father was only a little before his time. Many others more influential than he came in due course to follow him and to bring about changes towards responsible government in India. And year after year, irrespective of their views as to the rate at which India could become self-governing again, many of the best of our young men went from Britain to do their work of bringing order, fighting famine, diminishing disease, making railways, bridges and roads, administering justice and establishing integrity and efficiency, over the great continent of India.

But the Civil Servants were not the only Britons who went to India. There were the traders, there were doctors, missionaries and scholars, there were people interested in education, and among these last was my mother. Her father, starting as a wage-earner, made a modest fortune and, dying early, left her enough to live on. So at twenty-eight she was giving most of her time in London to teaching in a College for Working Women. While she was

thus engaged, a distinguished religious reformer from India—Keshub Chunder Sen—paid a visit to England and gave many addresses there. In one of these he made an eloquent appeal to English women to come and help their Indian sisters, to rescue them from ignorance and give them education. The point of Keshub's appeal was to ask for education without a new religion; Hinduism, he said, was or could be reformed into a satisfactory religion; teachers from England, not missionaries, were the prime need.

My mother listened to Keshub and was caught. She travelled out by herself in 1872—she had not heard of my father then—in order to start a school for Indian women and girls, independent of any mission. She did start it; I have met distinguished Indians whose mothers were among her pupils. She worked desperately hard at the school for two years in the sweltering heat of Calcutta. Then my father, who with his Indian sympathies had naturally helped her with the school, insisted that she should exchange looking after the school for the harder task, as he put it, of keeping him in order. So they married and after my father had finished his thirty-five years in India, they spent the rest of their long lives in this country, largely writing together about the history, languages and literature of India. My father did that quite consciously as something that he could still do for India, the country which, as he said, had been burned into him.

Both he and my mother had hosts of Indian friends. My father made one such friend in a characteristic way—not the way of a Nabob. While still in his twenties he was watching on the roadside a public procession, and found

at his feet a very small Indian boy unknown to him, struggling vainly to see the show between the legs of the grown spectators. My father hoisted the boy on his shoulders; the boy grew up to be Sir Krishna Govinda Gupta, a judge of the High Court, the first Indian member of the India Council, and a life-long friend. My mother went to India at the invitation of Indians and her first hosts there were Indians, Mr and Mrs Monmohan Ghose. Together my parents made a feature of 'international parties'. 'International' meant mixing not only British and Indians, but Hindus and Mohammedans. An English friend describing one such party in 1882, mentioned her curiosity to see how this problem of mixing would be solved, since Hindus and Mohammedans could not eat together. The problem was solved with complete satisfaction by having separate tables.

Last year I wrote the story of my parents in a book named *India Called Them*,* in order to show what this British adventure meant in the family life of those who took part in it. I have referred to this story here to illustrate the British adventure as an adventure for service, the service of bringing to India from afar good government which should lead to self-government. It is fair to claim for this adventure that it brought many good things to India which otherwise she might not have had to-day. It was equally clear that the adventure was bound to end some time in India being governed from within, as it is governed now in its two separate states of India and Pakistan. I have been using the term India here to cover both.

The British adventure had to end, for there were some

things which India needed that no government from outside could give her. The British tradition was that of leaving Indian ways of life in the main undisturbed, and they included some bad ways, like the caste system with its untouchable classes, like some of the marriage customs, like some of the laws of inheritance. Only a native government based on the free assent of the people can be strong enough to change such things. I am delighted that one of the earliest acts of the new Indian Government has been to change the first of them and to attack the evil custom of untouchability. I wish that my father could have known this.

India has to be governed from within. That is beyond question. Yet reflection on the British adventure in India suggests one final thought. The young men like my father, who from the middle of the nineteenth century went out from this country to serve in India included many of the very best of our young men, able, practical, sincere, devoted, highly trained. There are not too many such men in any nation in the world. India cannot help being somewhat poorer through not getting those we used to send her. My father's whole life in India was a protest against the idea that the only people capable of doing important work in India were people with white skins. It would be a sad opposite error if now no one was allowed or encouraged to do useful work in India unless he had a skin which was not white.

India, with all her ancient civilization, of which she has a right to be proud, has also problems of almost terrifying difficulty in dealing with want, squalor, disease and ignorance. In dealing with them she must, as far as government

goes, be as independent as Australia or New Zealand, or more so if that be possible. But I should be sorry if somehow people interested in attacking such problems could not still go easily to India to give their help to her as teachers, as scientists, as doctors, as social reformers, as organizers of business, could not go freely to serve, whatever the colour of their skin. I hope that some at least will still want to go there from Britain and will find a welcome.

NOTES

Lord Beveridge, b. 1897. Has been at different times a journalist, Civil Servant, M.P., Director of the London School of Economics and Master of University College, Oxford. In 1941-2, he produced a report on the basis of which Britain's present social services were set up.

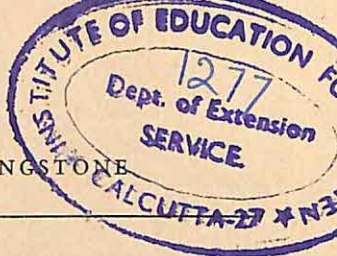
Clive and Warren Hastings and Dalhousie, three of the British Governors in India between 1760 and 1856.

Nabobs, another form of *nawab*, an Indian title of nobility. But the English word denoted wealth only.

wallah (word used in India), person employed to do a job.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington Macaulay, later Lord Macaulay, 1800-59, lawyer, politician, educationist and historian.

India Called Them, published by Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1949.



Glimpses of a New World

In the following talk a great scholar further elaborates the idea that the chief benefit of imaginative literature is that it introduces us to a new world of wider and deeper experience than our own, to all sorts and conditions of men and women that we should not otherwise encounter. The first part of the talk, however, exposes the real dangers of reading, and shows how easy it is to read much and yet learn little.



A friend—not a scholar by profession—once told me that the chief influence in his education was acting at school in the *Agamemnon* of Aeschylus* and so coming to know that masterpiece, as one can only know something that one has practically got by heart. I can entirely understand his experience. Nothing opens the eyes or enlarges the mind like meeting greatness: it is an essential element in any good education. And the *Agamemnon* is one of the

greatest of dramas. But I cannot think of any single book which has that effect on me. I owe much to many people, most perhaps to Ruskin* in my undergraduate days, and later to Plato,* both of whom saw long ago that the fundamental problems of the world, in economics as in politics, are human. In speaking of Ruskin, I am not thinking of his purple passages* or his elaborate analyses of cloud forms or Gothic architecture, but of his reflections on life. He seems to me full of acute judgements on our age, many of them written nearly a century ago, whose justice we are slowly beginning to understand. Perhaps the eclipse under which he has been for many years is passing. Plato, of course, is a far greater man. One understands Whitehead's* saying that 'he laid the foundation of all our finer thoughts', and that 'the European philosophical tradition consists of a series of footnotes . . . to the wealth of general ideas scattered through his writings'.

But before discussing books I should like to invite that intelligent person, the devil's advocate,* to say a few words. He will urge that reading is a dangerous occupation. Plato, he will remind us, suggested, half whimsically, that the invention of writing was a dis-service to the world. The result of books, Plato said, is that people make less use of their memories and their minds; they read much and learn nothing: they appear to know much and really know little; they seem wise without being wise. A paradox, but it contains a painful truth. The ages before printing had much better memories than our own. When children begin to read they generally cease to use their eyes for any other purpose. And some of the greatest

readers fall into Plato's category of people who read much and learn little, and seem wise without being wise.

I think that the devil's advocate and Plato have got hold of a good point there. The fact is that we all read too much and too fast, and we have not time to think about what we read: the result is that we do not digest it, and either it just passes through the mind, or, worse still, it is deposited there in undigested lumps, to cause trouble afterwards. How many people, having read a book, think critically what is true in it and what is false? Nor is it at all easy to think by oneself. One begins to think when one is contradicted, and books unfortunately do not contradict us—at any rate not loudly. In fact, as Plato continually insisted, the most effective way to think is through discussion. That seems to me one of the good points in the Chicago Great Books Classes. A number of people read a book and after a fortnight they meet to discuss it. The result is that they think as well as read, and this objection of Plato is at least partly met.

Now let the devil's advocate resume. He will go on to point out another danger in reading. Books expose us to the risk of keeping bad company. After all, literature is a considerable mix-up. In it men of genius or of high talent have recorded their feelings about life, their visions, their ideals, their passions, love and lust and hatred, hope and despair, cynicism and magnanimity. The only constant element in it is literary genius, the power of expression, a quality which, not very accurately, is sometimes called beauty. Apart from that, literature is a chaos of various emotions, and the power of reading exposes us to the impact of this chaos. Now reading is obviously a

major influence in forming our outlook, and therefore, in the long run, our actions. For two-thirds of that life-long process which is called education consists of suggestion—suggestion from the intellectual, moral, and spiritual atmosphere which we breathe, for the most part unaware that we are breathing it: and in miscellaneous reading we are exposing ourselves to an infinite number of suggestions that, as Newman* says, ‘fall upon the mind like dust, impalpable and ever accumulating’, slowly forming its contours. Some of these suggestions are good, some bad.

Years ago the French philosopher Bergson,* then in his late forties or early fifties, came to Oxford and I happened to meet him and asked him why he had (at that date) written nothing on ethics. He replied, ‘Morals are a serious matter: one must have thought much and be quite sure of oneself before one writes on them.’ But imaginative writers and poets rarely have such inhibitions. They pay little attention to the point of view which Kipling puts in the Rabbi’s Song:

For think, in all thy sadness,
What road our griefs may take;
Whose brain reflect our madness,
Or whom our terrors shake . . .
The arrows of our anguish
Fly farther than we guess.

And other arrows too. Poets and novelists pour out their feelings about life and the air is full of these arrows winged with imagination, these suggestions, some healthy, some harmless, some poisonous. That is why the devil’s advocate calls reading dangerous. I am sure that he is

right. Literature, like the air, is full of germs of many kinds, and we might be more aware of this fact than we are. Censorship and expurgation are a dubious, and in any case very limited, remedy against the evil. The best protection against dangerous germs is to be healthy; and a major purpose of education is—or ought to be—to make people healthy in spirit, as in intellect and body, so that they are immune from infection.

Now let me turn to the reasons for reading. First and most obvious is enjoyment. But there is something else that comes from reading. Homer* said of Odysseus that he saw many cities of men and knew their thought. And books enable us to see many cities of men and to know their thought; to visit infinitely more countries and to know the thought of far more men than Odysseus could do in the ten years of his wanderings after the fall of Troy. Make a classified list of characters in the novels that you have read in the past year, and see to how many different human beings they have introduced you. I look at the index of the dozen poems under the title of 'Men and Women' in Browning's* Collected Poems; if I read them I shall have met a Predestinarian,* three medieval painters, a Renaissance bishop, an orthodox but sceptical bishop of the nineteenth century; I shall have heard what a contemporary doctor may have thought of the raising of Lazarus,* and how a first-century Greek thinker may have felt about his age; and I shall have seen two pictures of a poet as Browning conceived him.

Books in fact are a way of visiting every country and meeting every kind of human being without ever leaving one's house. They extend incredibly the range of our

experience. They also deepen it ; which is something different, and much more important. This is true of all imaginative writing but it is especially true of poetry. To realize this try an experiment. Take the following subjects: Snow in London; A College Chapel; A Broken Marriage; Sussex. Write down the ideas that they call up in your mind. Then read the poem on ' London Snow ' by Robert Bridges ;* the sonnet on ' King's College Chapel ' by Wordsworth;* George Meredith's* ' Modern Love ' ; and Kipling's ' Sussex '. Or call up to memory a stormy day in early November; and then read Shelley's ' Ode to the West Wind '. And then ask yourself whether you have learnt nothing about the subjects with which they deal. I have taken some poems at random; but almost any poem would have served as well. So far as its themes are concerned most poetry deals with ordinary life, with the common world with which everyone is familiar. There is nothing very unusual about the West Wind, or Snow in London, or Sussex. But the poet sees in them aspects that escape us. As Wordsworth modestly says :

The outward shows of sky and earth,
Of hill and valley, he has viewed ;
And impulses of deeper birth
Have come to him in solitude.
In common things that round us lie
Some random truths he can impart,—
The harvest of a quiet eye
That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

A poet's imagination is a microscope which reveals a world that the unaided eye cannot discern. If we refuse to use the microscope, that world remains unknown to

us ; and our life is proportionately poorer. If we use it with intelligence, we shall appreciate the meaning of the famous sonnet in which Keats* compares his emotions on first reading Homer (in a very indifferent translation, by the way) to those of an astronomer,

when a new planet swims into his ken,

or those of an explorer when he discovers a hitherto unknown ocean ; and we shall understand why it has been said that a man can easily get on without food for a day but that he cannot live for a day without poetry.

The greatest service to the world of imaginative writers—men of religious or philosophic genius, poets, historians—is that they reveal to us things which otherwise we should never see ; looking through their eyes we catch a glimpse of a world of whose existence, but for them, we should not have dreamed.

NOTES

Sir Richard Livingstone, b. 1880. A former President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and Vice-Chancellor of the University. He is an authority on classical studies and on education, on both of which he has written several books.

Agamemnon of Aeschylus, one of the earliest and best Greek plays. Aeschylus lived from 525-456 B.C.

John Ruskin, 1819-1900. Writer on art and architecture.

Plato, 428-347 B.C. Greek philosopher and disciple of Socrates.

purple passages, highly colourful parts of his writings.

A. N. Whitehead, 1861-1949. English philosopher. Professor at Cambridge University, and later at Duke University, North Carolina.

the devil's advocate (in the Roman Catholic Church), the one who opposes the admission of any person to the class of 'Saints', and so, in general use, one who puts the case for the opposition in any argument.

John Henry Newman, 1801-90. He was at one time a priest in the Church of England; later he entered the Roman Catholic Church, and was created a Cardinal.

Henri Bergson, 1859-1941.

Homer, Greek epic poet, who lived about the ninth century B.C. He wrote the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The first tells how the Greeks took ten years to capture Troy; the second how Odysseus, a Greek, took ten years to get home afterwards.

Robert Browning, 1812-89.

Predestinarian, one who maintains the doctrine of predestination.

Lazarus, whom Jesus Christ raised from the dead.

Robert Bridges, 1844-1930.

William Wordsworth, 1770-1850.

George Meredith, 1828-1909.

John Keats, 1795-1821.

PETER SCOTT

In Search of Ross's Geese

In this talk Peter Scott describes an expedition he made with two companions in the summer of 1949 to the Canadian Arctic. The party was flown by aircraft to the snow-covered tundra some fourteen miles inland from the Arctic Ocean. Their declared intention was to find and study a rare kind of goose in its native haunts, but like most explorers they found a rare kind of happiness as well.



The tundra* can be very silent, but it isn't often, because almost always there is a wind blowing. But on this day it was still, and from afar, from the Perry River, we suddenly heard the cry of wild geese. It was an important moment for us because we had come there especially to find these geese—the lovely little miniature Snow Goose called Ross's Goose—white birds with black tips to their wings, and a soft rather muted call. We saw four of

them flying up the river which was still mostly frozen, with only a trickle of water running down on top of the ice, but it was exciting to see them and to feel that we had come to the right place.

Our first and main object was to study the birds, and particularly Ross's Goose, because as far as anyone knows this is the only part of the world where the Ross's Geese breed and no scientist had ever been there before. Two of us were primarily ornithologists, but the third member of the party was a research engineer who also knew a good deal about geology and surveying. So he was looking at the country with rather a different eye, and making maps of it.

For the first weeks the spring did not seem to advance at all. It was windy and cold and raw in the daytime with frequent snow-storms, and at night we sometimes had 15 degrees of frost. That was all through June and we thought the break-up* would never come. It was daylight all the time, but we kept a routine and went to bed soon after midnight. That was because we were keeping a meteorological record, and we had to read the instruments at noon and midnight. Our camp was quite comfortable. We had three tents, and made up a fourth one out of packing-cases covered with ground-sheets* which we used as a sort of laboratory. One tent was a fairly big bell tent and we used that by day and ate in it. We had taken most of our food with us, and we had three little cooking stoves which kept the day tent fairly warm and dried our wet clothes. Two of us slept in a very light small tent and the third member of the party had a tiny mountain tent to himself. We had inflatable air mattresses and excellent sleeping-bags.

If one awoke to a rattling of canvas, and peered out through the fly to see swirling snow or fog, or both, with visibility no more than 100 yards, there was not much incentive to climb out of the warm bag. We were just considering this problem one morning when we heard footsteps on the gravel outside. We called to each other from tent to tent to make sure that we were all still in bed. Then we realized that we had visitors. These were the first of the Kogmuit tribe of Eskimos to come and call on us. We took them into our day-tent and brewed tea for them. There were two of them—a man and a boy—Haunga and Kaota. They could speak no word of English at all, of course, and we at that time could talk almost no Eskimo. But with signs and drawings we managed to communicate fairly well.

It was still snowing hard an hour later when they set off over the hill on their way back to their camp, and we didn't see any more of the Kogmuit Eskimos for about ten days. Then, when the river had begun to thaw out and the level of it had gone up about 15 feet, with great lumps of ice 6 feet thick floating down it, another party of Eskimos—two families of them—came up with a canoe, and made their camp about a mile away from ours. These two families, each living in a white canvas tent, became our great friends and loyal helpers. The most intelligent of them was a little man called Topelakon. It was Topelakon and his colleague Taipan who led us to the big breeding colony of Ross's Geese, or Kangowan as the Eskimos call them. It was the only colony we found where the birds were breeding this summer. It was a two days' journey inland up out of the alluvial valley

of the Perry among small rocky hills with innumerable lakes. At last in pouring rain we came to Lake Arlone—a little larger than its immediate neighbours and with five islands on it, each of the islands dotted, almost covered, with the white birds sitting on their nests. There were 260 nests, and we were the first white people ever to see this particular colony, or indeed this lake. We called it Lake Arlone after my companion's wife.

We went to Lake Arlone a second time just after the Ross's Geese had hatched their goslings—exquisite little balls of silvery yellow down. We found a strange variation in the colour of this down. Some goslings were almost canary yellow—others platinum blonde*—and since this was unknown to science we were rather pleased with the discovery.

About the middle of July a fourth man joined our party. He was the pilot of a float-plane, and he flew in just as soon as the lakes were open enough for him to land. So for the last two weeks of our expedition we could explore by aeroplane; we covered an area about the size of Wales, pretty thoroughly. We found some new lakes ten or fifteen miles long, and a new river more than fifty miles long, and a hill which dominated the landscape although it was only 800 feet high.

And then came the sad day when we had to leave. We had grown tremendously fond of our patch of tundra—the patch of boggy moor and stony ridges—which by this time of year was quite clear of snow and richly covered with flowers—heathers, heaths, saxifrages, dwarf rhododendrons, and the beautiful stars of *Dryas* which is perhaps the commonest and certainly one of the

most cheerful of the Arctic flowers. We had grown fond of it in the warm early days of August, when we had thought about bathing in the lake below our camp, and only abandoned the idea because of the mosquitoes which were just beginning to get bad about the time we left. Above all we had grown fond of our great friends the Eskimos.

I shall never forget my last night coming down the Perry River by canoe in the midnight dusk. We had been catching some Ross's Geese to bring back alive, and the whole operation had been rather successful. The sky was clear and the night was very still and beautiful. The whole scene was black and orange. I remember I took the canoe down over the rapids, which was exhilarating and for a moment rather breath-taking and perhaps a little foolhardy, and then in the still waters below I paddled slowly on with an unforgettable feeling that this was how life should be lived—this was real—this was a peak of happiness.

NOTES

Peter Scott, b. 1909. An explorer, an authority on bird life, a painter, writer and yachtsman.

tundra, mossy, and often marshy, plain in the Arctic Circle with permanent frost under the top soil.

break-up, i.e. the melting of the ice.

platinum blonde, silvery-grey.

ground-sheet, waterproof sheet usually placed under things standing on wet ground.

C. V. WEDGWOOD

A By-Way of Reading

Here is yet another talk on reading, but of a special kind. The higher value of the great creative artists and novelists is freely acknowledged, but the well-known historian now wants to tell us of her particular love for the 'personal document', the odd and scattered diaries and letters which somehow have survived the ravages of time. These too have their importance as genuine voices from the past. Even the most unstudied and fragmentary of them makes its own appeal to the imagination. Studying them, she says, is like looking over the shoulders of the dead.



Somewhere in his essays Montaigne* complains that there are too many books. He says, if I remember rightly, that the world is 'stuffed with so horrible a multitude of volumes'. Montaigne is not the only wise man who has felt, from time to time, appalled by the incredible number of

books that the learning, or the industry, or, for that matter, the idle invention, of man has put into the world. It is always the studious man, the passionate reader, who wrings his hands over the number of books in the world. People who do not read, or who do not read much, do not mind about it; the number of books in the world worries them no more than the number of the sands of the sea, for they do not feel this agonizing compulsion to read them. They have never felt the anguish of the passionate reader—and yet somehow not altogether an unpleasant anguish—when he stands in front of those rising tiers of portly volumes, those tantalizing, serried ranks of titles, and thinks, ‘I shall never, no, I shall never be able to get through all these.’ And then, with an action which is second nature, even out of the depth of despondency, out goes his hand and he takes a volume off the shelf and opens it. The great quest begins again. The impossible challenge is defiantly accepted, for the passionate reader is always bent on the impossible. Very well then, he thinks, I may not be able to read them all, but I shall read as many as I possibly can. There is another side to this lament of the passionate reader about the number of books in the world. He does not really mean it. Secretly he is delighted. For he knows that books are not exhaustible like coal and oil and all the other riches of this planet; books will never run out.

To make some sort of a beginning the passionate reader has to discover the kind of books that he prefers. My own choice was given early to books about people; this was a great step forward in coming to grips with the ‘horrible multitude of volumes’ in the world, for naturally it ruled

out books not about people—books about steam-engines, or butterflies, or higher mathematics and so on. But even if you thus arbitrarily reduce the number of books to be read, there is still enough to be getting on with during a very long lifetime.

In fact, there must be an inner category of yet more favoured books: faced with a miscellaneous bookshelf, or let loose in a library or a bookshop, I know very well, after more than thirty years of fairly passionate reading, what is the kind of book to which I move like a needle to a magnet. It is a type of book a little difficult to define in clear terms; it is sometimes, but by no means always, literature in the aesthetic sense; it is always history in the purest sense although it is not the kind of book which is commonly meant when we speak of history. It is the raw material of history, the sort of book that in the modern jargon is called a 'personal document'—a book not intended by its writer for publication: a diary, or a bundle of letters perhaps, or some personal reflections jotted down in a note-book, which have somehow been overlooked by that destructive, capricious and indefatigable spring-cleaner,* time, and left lying about for later ages to come upon.

Some of these documents are extremely famous. There is the Diary of Samuel Pepys* which is a classic of literature in its own right—a classic because Pepys was not only a very meticulous diarist who lived in an eventful and amusing time, but because he also happened by an odd chance to be a very gifted natural writer so that he could capture on paper in the most spontaneous and free and easy way imaginable the colour and the action and the

atmosphere of a whole society. When you read his description of the Fire of London you hear the roaring and the crackling of the flames, you see them leaping from house to house; you hear the confused hubbub of the citizens pouring out of the doomed city along the choked, narrow streets; you even catch in your nostrils the thick tang of the smoke. I cannot think of any better account of the Great Fire—or indeed of any great fire—in the work of any imaginative writer that I know.

Then there are letters. They are best perhaps when they survive in family collections and bundles so that the reader coming on them years later can piece together from them a whole group of people, a whole society. I suppose the classic of this kind are the Paston Letters,* an astonishing collection which sets echoing in our ears the energetic, heartless epoch of the War of the Roses.*

A small but in her own way a very perfect letter writer is Dorothy Osborne,* whose love-letters to her future husband have come down to us. Her people were Royalists* who had suffered very badly for King Charles I; the man she wished to marry, William Temple, was a Roundhead,* though a very moderate, pleasant sort of Roundhead. It is very difficult to say why these letters are so fascinating; it lies in the personality of the writer; she is gentle, a little melancholy, sometimes witty, strangely imaginative—soft-voiced.

These are all in their way classics, books which have become in the widest sense public property. But there are also a great number of less well-known letters and diaries and papers which have been printed and published by such learned societies as the Camden Society, the Chetham

Society, and the numerous local record societies. And among these I have found some of my favourite reading. I should find it difficult to explain why in spite of the claims of so many evidently better diaries, let alone better books, I find such a work as the *Diary of Richard Symonds* so irresistible. Richard Symonds was a young volunteer in the army of Charles I, in fact he served in his Life Guards; and for two short periods of a few months he kept what he called a diary of 'the marches and moovings of His Majesties Royall Army'. (These fragments were edited ninety years ago and published by the Camden Society.) Though it is an old book, it is not in any sense rare. There are plenty of copies about. It is not a good diary in the Pepysian sense. But it has a charm entirely its own because Symonds succeeds in his higgledy-piggledy way in conveying an unintentional picture of the kind of man he was—and also the kind of war that the Civil War was. For one thing he was far more interested in local antiquities, especially churches and the heraldic inscriptions in them, than in the war he was supposed to be fighting. His diary is a mass of jottings about tombstones and coats of arms. Sometimes he throws in a poem someone has told him, or a recipe for stewing chops in beer. And he notices the weather—of course he notices the weather as he was often sleeping out in it. And there is that rainbow that he saw one September day just before dawn: 'This night I saw a rainbow within a mile of Denbigh at five in the morning, and the moon shined bright; 'twas just against the moon.'

I am not commending Richard Symonds, or any of his like, as great literature, but there is to me a pleasure to be

got from these unforced fragments which reveal the genuine man or woman that for me has hardly its equal among all the pleasures of reading. And these occasional moments of poetry are all the better because one comes on them rarely and suddenly, much as one comes on the poetic and the beautiful rarely and suddenly and unexpectedly in the course of everyday life. There is Adam Martindale, a Lancashire Puritan, whose autobiography is full of the most evocative pictures of family life in the Lancashire of the Stuarts,* and of sudden vivid incidents. Little Adam Martindale falling into the pond while his sister is doing the family washing at it, and nearly getting drowned, and then the distress about his elder brother who rejected the serious girl with a portion* whom his father had found for him and insisted on marrying a 'young, wild, airy girl, a great frequenter of wakes and merry nights'—you can hear the Lancashire voices, disapproving or gay or defiant.

Or in some otherwise uninteresting diary or note-book there may be a single phrase that stands out, as though the writer, with no natural gift of expression, had been able to find his tongue under the stress of some powerful emotion. I cannot get out of my head one phrase of this kind which I found at the end of a pitiful but rather commonplace account of a child's death. It is the father writing, and at the end he says, 'I hope I shall be excused for saying so much of this little boy, he was born my heir and this is all his inheritance.'

I know that what I have chiefly spoken of is only sometimes literature. It is, I frankly admit, a by-way of reading. But fragmentary and broken and awkward as many of

these personal documents are, they have one thing that no creative work of literature has got. They are, however stuttering and stumbling, the real voices of people who were once alive. You may argue and rightly argue that these stuttering personal documents, often written by people without the special gifts which characterized Pepys, cannot tell as much about human life and human problems as the great works of the creative artists. Surely there is more knowledge, more understanding of the complex and subtle relations of human beings, to be found among the great novelists and the great poets than in any diary ever written. This is true. There is certainly more to be learnt about ourselves and about life from reading Tolstoy's* *War and Peace* than from reading Pepys. In all Dorothy Osborne's love-letters there is nothing which gives the quintessence of a woman's feeling, in love, as Shakespeare can give it in a single speech; when, for instance, he gives to Juliet: 'Gallop apace ye fiery footed steeds.'

That is all true. And yet these scattered diaries and letters, these unofficial, as it were, undeliberate works of art have something—even the worst of them has something—that the great masterpieces have not got. They are the very words written by men and women of flesh and blood. Their very imperfection has a special value; for the great novels and great poems do not need anything added to them. Enjoyment of them can be almost, as it were, passive. But with these imperfect but genuine utterances the more imperfect they are, the more is the imagination called on to fill in the pattern. The more unfinished they are the more they seem to stimulate human

sympathy and compassion, to cry out for the reader's co-operation. In that I think they provide an exercise in imaginative understanding which the great masterpieces cannot give us. There is a rhyme one sometimes sees on tombstones in old churches:

Such as ye are, such were we.
Such as we are, such shall ye be.

That strikes rather a gloomy note. Reading the letters and diaries of people long dead, looking over the shoulders of the dead—for that is what it is—does not make me think of mortality. It makes me think rather of immortality, of the astonishing persistence and compassion of the human spirit in the face of obstacles.

These letters and diaries are the fragile records, the messages, the signals if you like, which have been made at random across the immense darkness of time. I like to pick up some of those signals.

NOTES

C. V. Wedgwood, b. 1910. She is a historian and contributes to many leading English journals.

Montaigne, 1533-92. French essayist.

spring-cleaner, the English housewife has the habit of giving her house an especially thorough cleaning each spring.

Pepys, 1633-1703.

Paston Letters, written between 1440 and 1486.

War of the Roses, civil war fought spasmodically between 1455 and 1485. The object of the war was to gain the throne of England. The emblem of one side was a white rose, of the other a red.

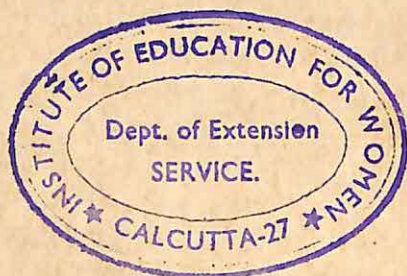
Dorothy Osborne, 1627-95.

Royalists and *Roundheads*, supporters of King Charles I and Cromwell, respectively, in the Civil War (1642-9) and afterwards. Charles I was defeated and beheaded; and Cromwell became Lord Protector of England.

Stuarts, the Kings of England from 1603-1714.

a portion, a dowry.

Tolstoy, 1828-1910. Russian writer.



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